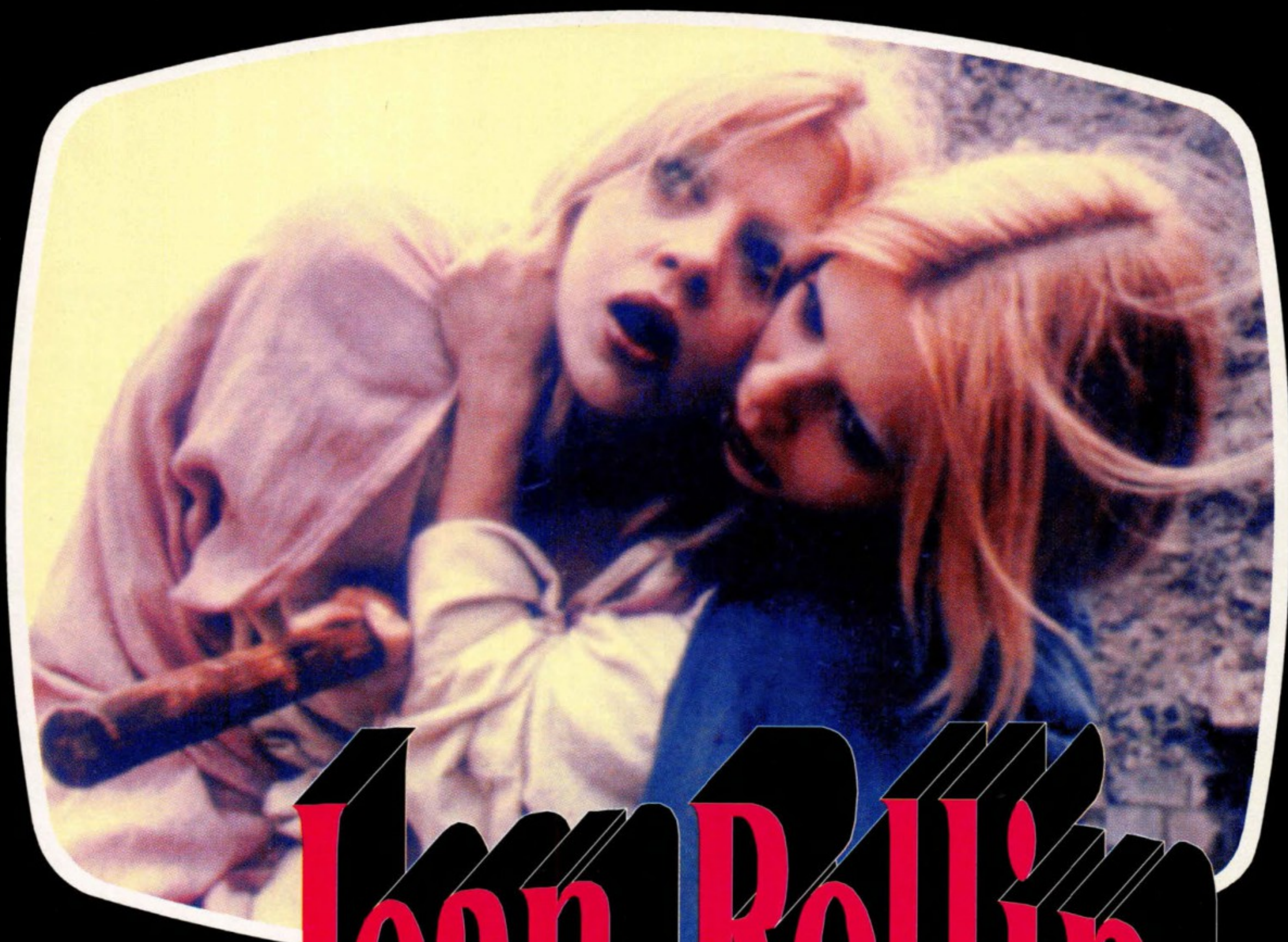


Video Watchdog

the Perfectionist's
Guide to
Fantastic Video

No. 31
\$6.50



Jean Rollin

*French Master
of Erotic Horror!*

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THE INNOCENTS!

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the Perfectionist's
Guide to
Fantastic Video

No. 31

*"Oh virgins, oh demons, oh monsters and martyrs—
Whose fabulous spirits reject all reality—
Searchers of the Infinite, devotées and satyrs...
To you, whom my soul has followed to Hell,
Poor sisters, I send my love and pity,
For your tenebrous sorrows, your unquenchable thirsts
And the coffins pumped full of love by your brimming hearts!"*

—Charles Baudelaire, *DAMNED WOMEN*

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Vampire*.

KENNEL

GREG BARR hosts "I Play Anime," a review segment on a cable TV program called FAST FORWARD: CONTEMPORARY SCIENCE FICTION in Washington DC. He is also a contributor to LASERVIEWS.

PETER BLUMENSTOCK's Lucertola Media label has just released a new limited edition CD of Stelvio Cipriani's score for **Solamente Nero** (aka **THE BLOODSTAINED SHADOW**), performed by Goblin. He is currently producing a compilation of music from the West German **Schülmädchen-Report** ("Schoolgirl Report") films of the 1970s.

JOHN CHARLES also covers Hong Kong films for Richard Akiyama's CINERAIDER. For a sample issue, send \$5.00 to P.O. Box 240226, Honolulu, HI 96824-0226.

DONNA LUCAS is the Heart and Soul of VIDEO WATCHDOG.

TIM LUCAS bicycled over 500 miles in 1995. He has made a New Year's Resolution to finish his long-awaited Mario Bava opus this year. Signed hardcover and paperback copies of his acclaimed first novel, THROAT SPROCKETS, are available from VIDEO WATCHDOG.

ERIK SULEV writes a Hong Kong Cinema column for The Phantom of the Movies' VIDEOSCOPE, and has contributed an article to John Martin's forthcoming GIALLO PAGES BOOK.

DOUGLAS E. WINTER had a private audience with Lucio Fulci at the recent Fango Con in New York. Doug is the author of "Loop," the concluding story in Nancy Collins' new erotic horror anthology DARK LOVE (Dutton hardcover).

VW THANKS:

AnimEigo, Steve Bisette, Juanita Bowman, Bravo Communications (Cindy Yip and Joe), Connoisseur Video (UK), Crest-Craft, David Del Valle, Chris Dietrich, Elite Entertainment (Vini Bancalari, Don May Jr.), Fox Video, Patti Getha, Harlan Typographic and Color, Image Entertainment (Garrett Lee), Bill Kelley, Lea Lander, Craig Ledbetter, Manga Entertainment (Matt Nigro), MCA Universal Video (Maria La Magra, Mark Simpson), New Line Home Video (Bob Blair), Orion Home Video (Jonna Winnicki), Pioneer LDCA, PM Entertainment Group, Redemption Video UK (Marc Morris), Redemption Video USA (Carl Morano), The Roan Group (Cary Roan, Toby Roan), Jean Rollin, St. Martin's Press, Sinister Cinema (Greg Luce), Streamline Pictures (Carl Macek), Tai Seng Video Marketing (Helen Soo and Marie Chan), Cathal Tohill, Pete Tombs, Video Search of Miami (Thomas Weissner), Wei Hu, our contributors, subscribers, distributors, and everybody who sent us a Christmas card!

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AIP/Orion Pictures (58), Cannon Video (21), Connoisseur Video UK (7), Crippled Dick Hot Wax (73), Manga Entertainment (19), MCA Universal (61), Newmark Film (4), Paramount (65), Pioneer LDCA (25), Primitive Press (74), Redemption Video UK (23), Renaissance Productions (70), Jean Rollin (front, inside, 28-57, back), Sinister Cinema (12), Streamline Pictures (27), Tai Seng Video Marketing (13, 15), 20th Century Fox (66), Video Search of Miami (17), Walt Disney Home Video (62, 63, 76), Warner Home Video/DC Comics (9-10), and John Weber Collection (68). **LOGO & COVER FORMAT:** Radomir Perica, International Design Studio, Bethesda, MD.

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VISIT THE VIDEO WATCHDOG WORLD WIDE WEB SITE: <http://www.cinemaweb.com/videowd>

A MESSAGE To OUR READERS



SINCE TIM AND I began this magazine in 1990, we have come to realize that newsstand distribution is a blessing and a curse: a blessing because it allows VW to be seen and perused by potential new readers, a curse because of high costs. But we accept it as a fact of life. We need interested readers to find us, but trying to find them is a roll of the dice. Distributors locate retailers, but they sometimes force those retailers to buy a minimum amount of magazines before they can receive any. Thus, returned (unsold) issues become an absolute certainty, and the numbers can be high. We must pay the cost of printing those extra issues and shipping them to distributors. If they don't sell, we aren't reimbursed—they are destroyed.

Lately, we've been seeing an increase in reported returns, while at the same time, we've been receiving more calls than ever before from devoted readers complaining that they can't find us in stores! Either our distributors are not supplying the stores frequented by our audience, or retailers are taking too long to put VW on display, or it's selling out too quickly. Believe me, we know how frustrating it can be to make repeated trips to your favorite newsstand, only to be disappointed by a no-show, or worse yet, to find a new VW and discover that you've missed an issue!

Most magazines, like network television, exist to deliver advertising. VIDEO WATCHDOG, on the other hand, does not accept outside advertising. It's hard enough to squeeze all the information we have on hand into our bimonthly, 80 page format. If we were truly in the "magazine business" we would take a banker's attitude toward the whole venture. We would sell lots of advertising space, then fill in the rest with fluffy articles about whatever was most likely to attract the greatest number of readers. We would print 100s of 1000s of copies to impress advertisers with our circulation, keeping our advertising rates high. It wouldn't matter how many copies we sold because our advertisers would have already covered our production costs. Tim and I entered the magazine business with a less mercenary attitude, and it has taken us awhile to learn the financial risks of putting *information* first.

We have decided to do business a little differently. Beginning with our next issue, we will be working only with those newsstand distributors and retailers who have proven themselves capable of marketing VW effectively. This should not make VW harder to find. If you can't find us at your favorite store in the next couple of months, complain to the staff—and advise them that VIDEO WATCH-DOG is available through I.P.D., Ingram, Fine Print, Capital City and Diamond Comics—or, they can place their orders directly with us by using our toll-free number.

The increasing costs of retail distribution have forced us to raise our cover price by one dollar. At the same time, our subscription rates *have not* increased, because the cost of mailing to subscribers has not gone up significantly. There has never been a smarter time to sample a First Class VW subscription—you're guaranteed not to miss an issue, you'll receive it weeks earlier than most stores, *and you'll be saving money at the same time!*

We're often asked about the difference between First Class and Bulk Rate subscriptions. If you're the least bit picky about how your copy looks upon arrival, you should definitely be a First Class subscriber. You'll receive your issues within 3 days of mailing—that goes for international subscribers, too!—and they will arrive in a sturdy, cardboard mailer ensuring mint condition. Bulk Rate copies are shipped in a heavy envelope and take quite a bit longer to arrive. The average delivery time is 2-3 weeks after mailing—and they seldom arrive in mint condition. But it costs less to send Bulk Mail, and we pass that savings on to you.

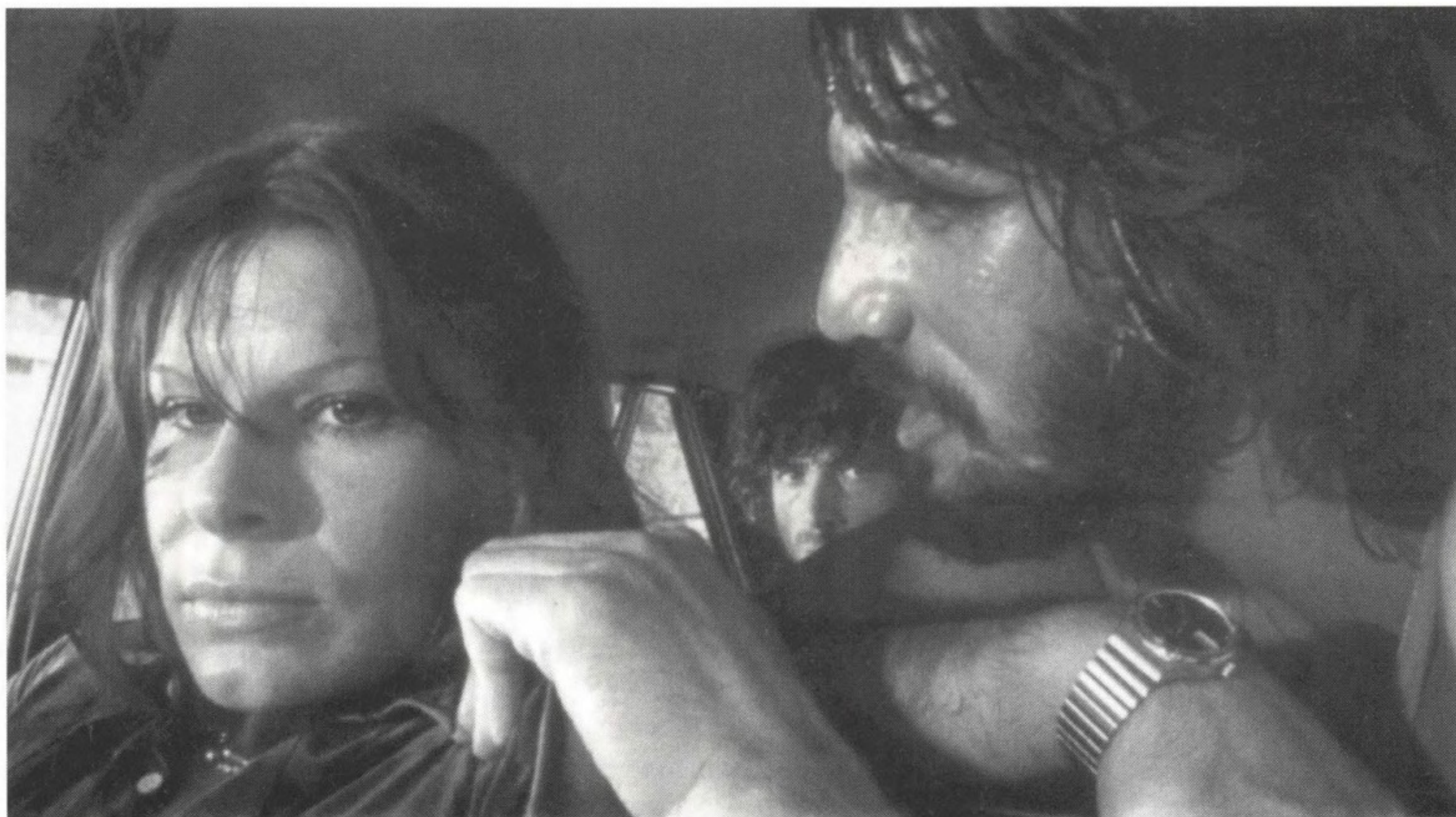
If you're still undecided, why not experiment with a 2-issue trial subscription? See if we don't beat the stores and arrive in better condition! For details, check out our special offer on the last page, and look for our *FREE BINDER* incentive.

Our subscribers are *very* important to us. Subscription funds help us to maintain the daily operating costs of publishing VIDEO WATCHDOG: printers' fees, postage, supplies. If you're already a VW subscriber, Tim and I thank you for your loyal support! Your vote of confidence makes VIDEO WATCHDOG a success for us all!

Donna Lucas

WATCHDOG NEWS

New BAVA / ROLLIN Films Seek US Distribution



TWO NEW, important and *unexpected* works of European cult cinema premiered last November at the MIFED film market in Paris. One was ***Les Deux Orphelines Vampires*** ("The Two Vampire Orphans"), Jean Rollin's first horror film in several years, starring Tina Aumont, Brigitte Lahaie and Martin Snaric. The other was

Semaforo rosso ("Red Traffic Light"), a relentless crime thriller starring Aldo Caponi, Lea Lander and Luigi (***Anthropophagous***) Montefiori. The latter is the newly completed version of ***Cani arrabbiati*** ("Rabid Dogs"), a legendary unfinished work directed by the late Mario Bava in 1974. Both films are currently seeking international theatrical and video distribution.

Semaforo rosso, based on the Ellery Queen story "Man and Boy," is the suspenseful saga of three murderous bank robbers (Caponi, Montefiori and Maurizio Poli) who elude the police by seizing a sexy hostage (Lander) and

overtaking a car idling at a stop light. Driving the car is a nervous man (Riccardo Cucciola), intent on taking a mortally ill child passenger to the hospital. The film tautly documents their attempts to outdistance a police dragnet, as the car becomes a pressure-cooker of personalities and secret agendas.

The film was impounded shortly before the completion of filming, when producer Roberto Loyola filed for bankruptcy. The completed version (post-produced by Lea Lander and Angelo Marzullo for the Milan-based Newmark Film) contains only two brief helicopter shots not directed

Lea Lander is terrorized by Luigi Montefiori in Mario Bava's high octane thriller, SEMAFORO ROSSO.

by Bava, and it features the nerve-whittling, ostinato score originally composed for the picture 22 years ago by Stelvio Cipriani (**A BAY OF BLOOD**). The existing print is in Italian, but much of the dialogue was spoken by the actors in English, making it comparatively easy to post-synch for domestic release.

Made shortly after his masterpiece **LISA AND THE DEVIL**, **Semaforo rosso** is a startling revelation. Bava's only wholly realistic film, its story is told in real time, and takes place almost entirely inside a moving car. The result is a technical *tour de force* on the level of Hitchcock's **LIFE-BOAT**. Unlike any other picture made by Bava, it portrays reality in such a cynical and harrowing light that it seems to explain why he preferred to specialize in stylized, poetical works of dark fantasy. The film's closest relatives would seem to be Wes Craven's **LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT** and Quentin Tarantino's **RESERVOIR DOGS**—in fact, considering the film's original title, it's easy to imagine that, if Tarantino's film had been a hit in the late '70s, Bava's film would have popped up at drive-ins soon after under the title **RESERVOIR DOGS 2!** (What do you say, Quentin? Here's your big chance to "present" the last film by one of your favorite directors!)

Jean Rollin's **Les Deux Orphelines Vampires**, discussed elsewhere in this issue, is very much in the erotic and lyrical vein of vampire fiction popularized by Anne Rice. Unlike the big-budget, first-attempt extravaganzas that predominate the American marketplace (**BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA**, **INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE**), Rollin's film is a rare example of a film organically connected to the ongoing fabric of the vampire cinema, popular in Europe

since the 1920s, in which Rollin himself has specialized since the late 1960s. Given a properly respectful presentation, with subtitles, there is no reason why **Les Deux Orphelines Vampires** could not share the repertory success enjoyed by such films as **NADJA**, **THE ADDICTION** and **THE GIRL WITH THE HUNGRY EYES**.

Serious inquiries about acquiring the theatrical or video rights to these films are asked to contact Peter Blumenstock at Lucertola Media, Limbacherstrasse 82, 91126 Schwabach, Germany (Tele/Fax: 011-49-91-227-7372).

Redemption Comes to USA

Since their formation a few years ago, Redemption Video—a British video label specializing in European films of horror and eroticism—has been repeatedly thwarted by censorship imposed on their releases by the British Board of Film Classification. Indeed, two planned Redemption releases (Jess Franco's **DEMONIAC** and the women-in-prison film **BARE BEHIND BARS**) were banned outright by the BBFC. In response to the strict policing of their product at home, and the widescale bootlegging of their titles abroad, Redemption announced last year that they would soon be fighting back by launching an American subsidiary.

After months of speculation at who might win this coveted franchise, Redemption has chosen Carl Morano (of Morano Movies) and Eric Mache (of Mache Movie Marketing) to represent them as their exclusive, authorized mail order source on this side of the Atlantic. Redemption USA has now released their first cassette, **CLIVE BARKER'S SALOME & THE FORBIDDEN** (#RED001), a

70m 40s compilation of two experimental B&W shorts scripted and directed by Barker between 1973 and 1978. The tape also includes a postscriptive interview segment in which Barker and **HELLRAISER** colleagues Doug Bradley ("Pinhead") and screenwriter Peter Atkins reminisce about their collaboration on these early productions. The first issue of this cassette is a collector's limited edition of only 5000 copies, distinguished by silver lettering on the front and spine.

SALOME (1973, 17m 33s) is a silent film adaptation of Barker's early stage play about the famous dance that King Herod rewarded with the head of John the Baptist. Shot on the cheap in grainy, starkly expressionistic B&W, the film is equal parts Peter Brook and Andy Milligan, with Anne Taylor's Salome dancing and glowering madly at the 8mm camera from the shadows of a dank Liverpool florist's basement. Although incoherent, the short is fascinating and contains fleeting moments wherein the young director succeeds in capturing a palpable sense of nightmare and delirium.

THE FORBIDDEN (1975-8, 35m 38s), on the other hand, seems to be a wholly successful, mature piece of experimental cinema; it is also a clear-cut antecedent to the **HELLRAISER** trilogy and, in terms of its imagery, the most demonic and candid film Barker has made to date. The freeform narrative focuses on a painter (Peter Atkins) creating a Brion Gysin-like graphic of hieroglyphic text and mosaic arrangement, whose construction renders him vulnerable to the intervention of demons from another dimension, who dazzle him, seduce him, prick a similar design into his flesh, and then proceed to flay the "canvas" from his bones and sinews. The entire film was processed in

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negative, and contains an assortment of successful experiments in which objects and people are deliberately miscolored to appear "positive" onscreen. The result is a parade of ceremonial images that startle and horrify, while laying the foundation of Barker's now-familiar landscape of dark imagination. These films are to Barker's *oeuvre* what **STEREO** and **CRIMES OF THE FUTURE** are to David Cronenberg's—daring, undiluted and uncompromising rehearsals for the commercial work yet to come. Consumers should be advised that both films are unrelentingly adult in their imagery, and **THE FORBIDDEN** will no doubt attract much discussion as the first horror film to show its director naked and spinning himself dizzy while sporting a full erection.

CLIVE BARKER'S SALOME & THE FORBIDDEN sells for \$29.00 postpaid and is available by mail order from Redemption USA, 8822 Second Avenue, North Bergen NJ 07047. The unrated tape (labelled "Mature") will also be sold at Tower Video and most other major chains.

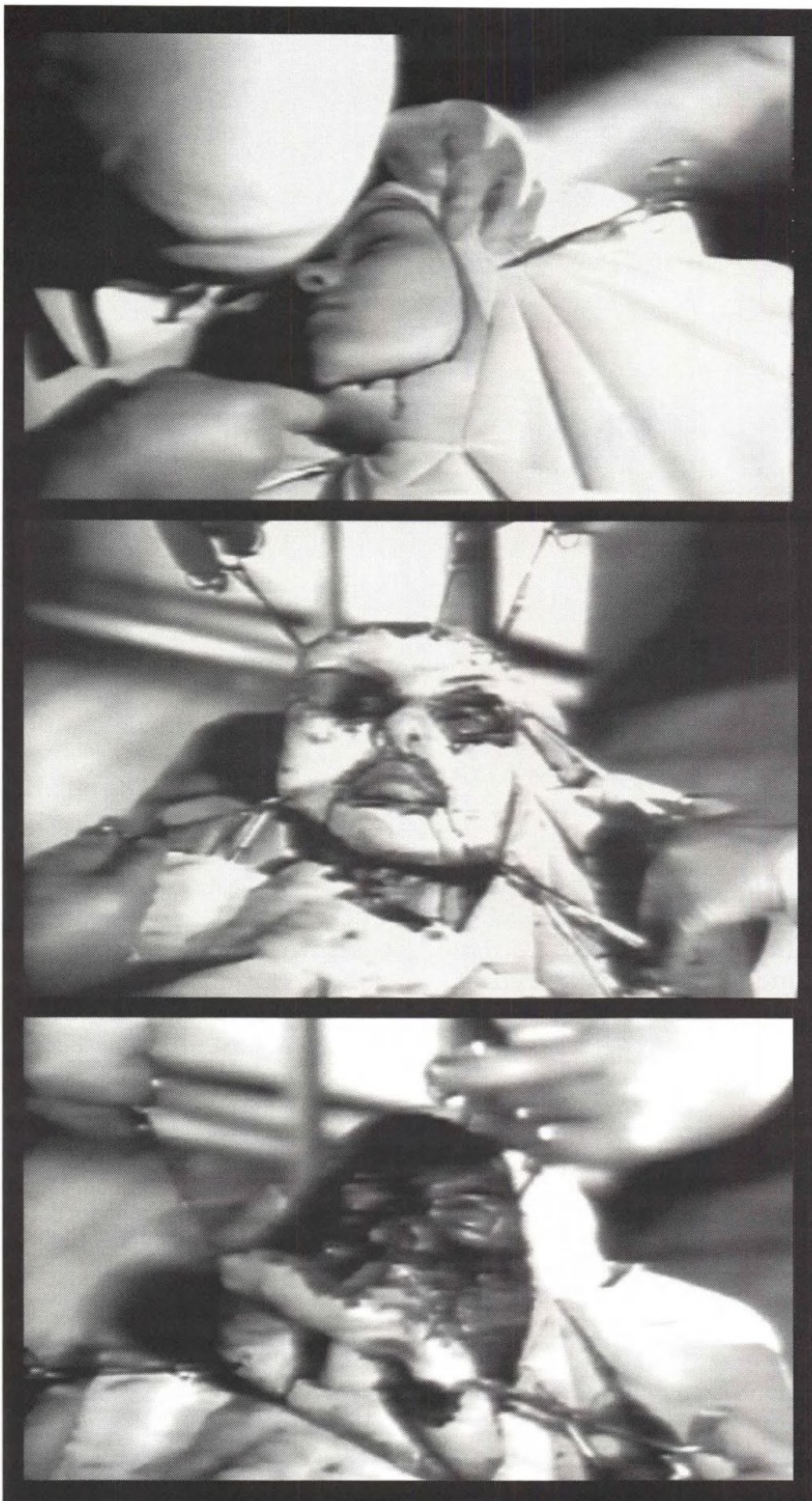
Redemption USA will soon announce an initial release slate of 25 titles, which will be presented uncut, unrated and in their original aspect ratios. Expected to be part of this inaugural list are Amando de Ossorio's "director's cut" of **TOMBS OF THE BLIND DEAD**, Jess Franco's **TENDER AND PERVERSE EMANUELLE** and **FEMALE VAMPIRE** (aka **THE LOVES OF IRINA**), the British banned **BARE BEHIND BARS**, and most interesting of all, a newly discovered "director's cut" of Michael Armstrong's notorious **MARK OF THE DEVIL**, including the never-before-seen finale of the dead rising from their graves (as described by Udo Kier in VIDEO WATCHDOG SPECIAL EDITION #2)!

Franju Classic Gets New Facelift

Extraordinary news from England, where Connoisseur Video (a division of the British Film Institute) has released an expanded version of Georges Franju's **Les Yeux sans Visage** ("Eyes Without a Face," 1959), which has long been assumed to be complete. The new version runs 86m 9s in PAL—which translates to 89m 47s when shown at 24 frames per second.

A brief history of running times: The film has been released on video in the United States in three different versions: Sinister Cinema's English-dubbed **THE HORROR CHAMBER OF DR. FAUSTUS** (83m 45s), the same company's subtitled version (87m 59s), and Intervista Video's subtitled and letterboxed **THE EYES WITHOUT A FACE** (87m 43s), which was also released on disc by Image Entertainment. (The subtitles for the latter version were translated by Sonya Friedman, who later won celebrity in the US as a pop psychologist, best-selling self-help author, and CNN chat show hostess!) In Great Britain, the film was previously released by Intervision as **EYES WITHOUT A FACE** in its original BBFC "X" cinema version, which ran only 79m 31s in PAL—or 82m 52s at 24 fps!

Connoisseur Video's new release runs 2m 4s longer than the Intervista tape and disc, and is most startling for adding over a minute of extra footage to the notorious face grafting sequence! Whereas all previously released prints have faded to black as the severed face was pried loose from its donor's skull, the new version adds footage of the face being cut loose—then *actually shows us what lies beneath*—anticipating Jess Franco's **FACELESS** (1988) by almost 30 years!



◀ *Juliette Mayniel gives her face to science—more graphically than ever before—in Connoisseur Video's restored LES YEUX SANS VISAGE.*

Retitlings

O.S.S. (Scan Euro) is a bootleg from a British source of Walter Grauman's **THE LAST ESCAPE** (1970), a WWII thriller with Stuart Whitman and Pinkas Braun.

SHAOLIN CHALLENGES NINJA (Vista #VVA 022, HF/OP, 100m 53s) is the Shaw Brothers actioner **HEROES OF THE EAST** (1979) by director Lau Kar-leung (aka Liu Chia-liang) starring Gordon Lau Kar-fei (aka Liu Chia-hui) which played stateside as **CHALLENGE OF THE NINJA**.

TARGET REMOVED (Ambassador) is a censored bootleg from a British source of Antonio Isasi's **THE SUMMERTIME KILLER** (1973), starring Karl Malden, previously available from Magnetic Video and Embassy Home Entertainment.

THE WILD ONES (Mei Ah LD #ML 082, LB, 93m 35s) is Francis Sung and David Lam's female JD drama **I AM GREEN** [*Wo wei cheng nian*, "I Am Not Yet An Adult," 1989] starring Fennie Yuen Kit-ying and Loletta Lee Lai-chun. The Cantonese only analog disc presents this 1.85:1 feature without video mattes: the image appears in fullscreen during sequences shot in Toronto, the remainder measures out at 1.60:1.

Unfortunately, the release of this tape invalidates Image's otherwise exceptional out-of-print laserdisc, and we can only hope that a legitimate domestic release will soon be forthcoming. By a strange coincidence, Franju's film recently had a theatrical revival in

Chicago, making use of a 35mm print distributed by Facets Multimedia. We have not as yet been able to ascertain whether this print contains the recently unearthed additional footage or not.

[Thanks to VW Informant Marc Morris for sending this tip!]

—John Charles



VIDEO TAPEVINE

By
Tim Lucas
Erik Sulev
John Charles

*He's a
Roman,
She's a
Hologram
Man—and
Dad's a Hero*

A NOTE ON TIMINGS

The timings listed for the following tapes reflect only the length of the film itself, and do not include such ephemera as video company logos, FBI warnings, supplementary trailers, or MPAA ratings certificates. The only exceptions to this rule are those films in which the soundtrack is first heard while the distributor's logo is still onscreen.

BATMAN FOREVER

1995, Warner Home Video
#15100 (VHS), #15100 (LD) D/S/
SS/CC, \$19.98, 121m 25s (VHS);
D/S/SS/AC-3/LB/CC, \$39.98,
121m 57s (LD)

Perhaps Michael Keaton's abandonment of the lead role in this second sequel to Tim Burton's **BATMAN** (1989) predisposed audiences to disappointment, but **BATMAN FOREVER** isn't as bad as you've heard. Once again, Batman (Val Kilmer replacing Keaton) is challenged by two criminals: Two-Face (Tommy Lee Jones), formerly Gotham City district attorney Harvey Dent (played in the first film by Billy Dee Williams) and now a half-disfigured maniac who makes life-and-death decisions on a coin toss; and The Riddler (Jim Carrey), a disgruntled Wayne Company employee whose intelligence skyrockets after testing a new brain-gain invention. Together, they plan to conquer Gotham City by marketing a box that makes TV programs appear three-dimensional, wraparound and interactive... while tapping and sapping the mind power of its users. Meanwhile, Bruce

Wayne is tormented by recurring nightmares of his parents' murders, which coincide with his romantic encounter with psychologist Chase Meridian (Nicole Kidman), and his feelings of guilt over the deaths of The Flying Graysons, a family trapeze act, which orphan a young man (Chris O'Donnell) he takes into his home.

Joel Schumacher (**THE LOST BOYS**, **FLATLINERS**), who tends to be a director of considerable flash and little substance, is in his element here, creating a vibrant, colorful, gravity-defying circus-of-a-movie that almost never seems at a loss for a striking visual idea.

KEY

+	Supplements
CC	Closed Captioned
D	Digital
HF	Hi-Fi
LB	Letterboxed
LD	Laserdisc
MA	Multiple Audio
NSR	No Suggested Retail
OP	Out of Print
S	Stereo
SS	Surround Sound



The Dark Knight (Val Kilmer) is puzzled and puzzled till his puzzler is sore in BATMAN FOREVER.

As with his recent vigilante fantasy **FALLING DOWN** (1993), there appears to be a growing need in Schumacher to become more expressively nourishing, and **BATMAN FOREVER** achieves this end to a greater degree than anything else he's done. The script (by Lee Batchler, Janet Scott Batchler and Akiva Goldsman) is anything but mindless; its action scenes are dazzling and exciting, and best of all, it redirects the ponderous, downbeat self-indulgence funereally celebrated in the Tim Burton films toward a more positive, socially responsible end. Instead of cramping his style as a lone avenger, Robin (at least in this scenario) ultimately serves as a healthy disruption in Bruce Wayne's narcissistic pool, helping to reinvent the man who *must* be Batman, to cure his own mind, as the man who *chooses* to be Batman, to cure society's ills. (We're told that Robin's rather inventive approach to doing the laundry was stolen, shot for shot, from a

Hong Kong martial arts film excerpt included in **THE DEADLIEST ART**, a documentary released by—guess who?—Warner Home Video.)

The ideas are there, but they are buried under a lot of frosting. This is an epic of set design (Barbara Ling) and cinematography (Stephen Goldblatt) *par excellence*, and the costumes are also breathtaking. The film boasts a superb Elliott Goldenthal score, more intricate and less barnstorming than Danny Elfman's music in the previous films, stirring and melodic, with a nice dash of Nino Rota during the elaborate party sequence. The performances are also generally strong, with Tommy Lee Jones a stand-out as Two-Face, reinterpreting The Joker by way of his **NATURAL BORN KILLERS** jail warden and making it more than the sum of its parts. With his deranged rodeo clown panache and superbly realized Rick Baker makeup, Jones provides a snappy, unpredictable foil to Jim

Carrey's equally flamboyant, if considerably less threatening Riddler. Chris O'Donnell brings likability, emotional range and athletic dazzle to the long-awaited role of Robin, whose DETECTIVE COMICS origin story has been thoughtfully reimagined and updated. Val Kilmer, 95% convincing as Jim Morrison in **THE DOORS**, makes an adequate if impersonal Batman, most of whose athletic feats appear to have been executed digitally by John Dykstra. He's less effective as Bruce Wayne, a fashion plate Hamlet too outwardly perfect and narcissistic to be believable as an introvert obsessed with the deaths of his parents. The returning Pat Hingle (Commissioner Gordon) and Michael Gough (Alfred) supply the only notes of continuity, with Alfred impishly taking credit this time around for the homoerotic body sculptures that pass for our heroes' costumes. (The montage introducing Batman's new sonar-equipped costume culminates in lingering views of



Jim Carrey as The Riddler—stealing more scenes than loot in BATMAN FOREVER.

his gloved fist and muscular buttocks.)

A prominently-billed René Auberjonois speaks exactly two lines as Arkham Asylum's gloomy, long-haired director Dr. Burton (!); the character figured more prominently in 35mm advance preview prints, which opened with Two-Face's escape from said institution—a cute way of figuratively liberating the series from its previous director, which also gave the film (which ends in Arkham Asylum) a nice bookended structure. Given Warner's staunch tradition of reticence in this area, it's highly unlikely that this trimmed footage will resurface on laserdisc anytime soon.

Warner's sell-through tape has been mass-produced and Macrovision-treated, resulting in a dark, unclear and generally unsatisfying full-screen image. The stereo surround sound is predictably fabulous, with the somersaulting of Two-Face's tossed coin flapping the wind at the front and back of the room

in heavy, almost palpable swoops. Wow.

The same is even truer of Warner's laserdisc, which mattes the image (overzealously) to approximately 1.90:1. Compared to the tape release, some upper and lower pictorial information has been matted over (eg., the MPH reading on the screen of the capsule that Bruce Wayne rides down to the Batcave is cut in half), with a smidgen of additional picture added to the periphery. It offers less picture, but we found the additional crispness of image found on the disc to be essential to our viewing enjoyment. The main titles appear to have been computer generated over the internegative, resulting in some shimmer and blur. The first side break is somewhat disruptive, and the closed-captioning, while faithful to the spoken dialogue, delivers none of the nuances of Carrey's performance. Side 3 of the two-disc set is in CAV. Onscreen title: **FOREVER.** —TL

BURNING PARADISE

1993, Tai Seng [US]/Bravo [Can.] #1542 (2 tapes), HF/LB, \$79.98 [US], 103m 34s

Tai Seng/Bravo/Star Entertainment #SEL0622H94/EL0623H94 (LD), D/MA/LB, \$210.00 [US], 103m 41s

The bleakest martial arts thriller in many a moon, Ringo Lam Ling-tung's **Huo shao hong lian si** ("Fire at Red Lotus Temple") finds legendary Ching Dynasty heroes Fong Sai-yuk (**DRUNKEN MASTER III**'s Willie Chi Tian-sheng) and Hung Hei-kwun (Yang Sheng) caught up in the Manchu government's quest to exterminate the students of Shaolin Temple. Following his capture at the hands of Manchu general Crimson (John Ching Tung), Fong is incarcerated with his fellow pupils at Red Lotus Temple, a subterranean netherworld riddled with booby traps. Turning his back on Shaolin, Hung allies himself with the prison commander, Elder Kung (Wong Kum-kong,

billed here as "K.K. Wong"), a brutal psychopath who likes to adorn his garish paintings with human blood, while seeking new specimens for his collection of mummified women.

Almost unrelentingly dark and cynical (aside from some effectively droll moments in the opening reel), **BURNING PARADISE** can be looked upon as the antithesis of producer Tsui Hark's quixotic **ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA** series, playing more like a cross between Lam's nerve-wracking condemnation of HK's educational system, **SCHOOL ON FIRE** (*Xue xiao feng yun*, 1988), and his fierce yet decorative gangster thriller **FULL CONTACT** (*Xia dao Gao Fei*—"Chivalrous Criminal Ko Fei," 1992). Particularly effective is the second act (highlighting the students' attempt to escape the dungeons) which unfolds tautly amidst the most cogent visuals of the director's career. The one stumbling block the film cannot overcome is its lack of a strong central performance, a key component in Lam's best work. When stacked up against a seasoned character actor like Wong Kum-kong, the young cast of newcomers make little impact when they aren't darting around on the lavish, multi-tiered sets. A box office failure, this forceful production's reputation should almost certainly improve with time and it seems a sure candidate for cult adulation in the West.

The source print for this double tape set (available in both Cantonese and Mandarin editions) is a bit worn down and splicy in spots, with the 1.85:1 frame presented at 1.80:1. While not perfect, this version is more complete than the censored Taiwanese tape from Vidi Video (a parallel import) but is still missing the brief shot where

Kung decapitates one of his handmaidens. Much of the film takes place in semi-darkness but most of the detail still comes through. However, the color transfer renders the red lettering in the opening credits largely illegible and surface noise can be heard during quieter moments on the Cantonese soundtrack. Tai Seng and Bravo also distribute the bilingual (Cantonese digital/Mandarin analog) Star Entertainment disc set (packaged in separate jackets) which presents the film on three CLV sides, utilizing the same transfer (the tape edition is missing the first few seconds of the opening title, accounting for the slight discrepancy in running times). A no-name bootleg LD set of reportedly good quality (packaged in a gatefold sleeve with no title on the spine) is also circulating. —JC

DEATH AND THE MAIDEN

1994, New Line #4119 (VHS), Image Entertainment #ID3011-LI (LD); HF/S/SS/CC, NSR (VHS), \$39.99 (LD), 103m 3s

Roman Polanski's latest, based on the play by Ariel Dorfman, may seem compromised at first glance—being a story about three Latin Americans dealing with their memories of the agonies inflicted by a former South American dictatorship, in which not a single authentic Latino actor has been cast—but the powerful feelings and sympathies it displays are as inarguable as they are riveting. Sigourney Weaver excels as Paulina Escobar—the wife of Gerald, a rising reformist politician (Stuart Wilson)—who was blindfolded and repeatedly raped and tortured 15 years earlier by a fascist doctor hoping to procure the identity of

Gerald, then a student revolutionary leader. (The film's title refers to a Schubert composition which her assailant was fond of playing during his sessions.) Suffering a flat tire during a storm after being nominated to a seat of power in the new revisionist government, Gerald is rescued by a fellow traveller, Dr. Roberto Miranda (Ben Kingsley), whose voice and mannerisms Paulina recognizes as those of her former tormenter. As Gerald and Miranda wile away the storm over drinks, Paulina steals the doctor's car and wrecks it, only to return and subject him—and her mild-mannered, politically sensitive husband—to a night of violent abuse, demanding that he admit his identity and sign a full confession.

This is a superbly acted film, its high emotions intermittently goosed with quirky Polanskian dialogue (scripted by Dorfman and Rafael Yglesias), and the absence of Latino actors helps to delineate it as a descendant of **KNIFE IN THE WATER** (1962) and **CUL-DE-SAC** (1965)—another portrait of a weak man caught in a triangular situation—as well as an attempt on the director's part to make peace with the violence in his own past. While the film concludes that some crimes are unforgivable because their memory never completely disinhabits the present, it also illustrates the futility of violence to destroy an individual or an ideal, no matter to what extent it may distort them.

The great Tonino Delli Colli, who also photographed **BITTER MOON**, seems to be evolving a specific style for his collaborations with Polanski as he did previously with Pier Paolo Pasolini and Sergio Leone; his naturally sleek compositions appear to contain not an ounce of artifice,



*Two-Face's evil half sister? No, It's Lisa Gaye
in the Mexican/American co-production FACE OF TERROR!*

and look most deliberate when realism intrudes in the form of a flashlight or overturned lamp. His images are predominantly charged with cool blues and grays, yet the intimate nature of the dialogue and images (eg., Paulina holding her bound captive's penis during a trip to the bathroom, Gerald relaxing his wife's tension by sucking her nipple) perversely conjure an atmosphere of human warmth and dependency that is unprecedented in Polanski's films. On tape, Delli Colli's 1.85:1 compositions are cropped to full-screen, but thanks to the film's stagy blocking, the film fares better this way than did New Line's tape of the more baroquely composed **BITTER MOON**. The Image disc adds slivers of peripheral vision, and the digital transfer looks and sounds predictably sharper.

The stereo surround mix is cleverly attuned to impact the viewer with sudden violent noises and the churning emotions underlined by another first-rate score by Wojcech Kilar (**BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA**). —TL

FACE OF TERROR

*1962, Sinister Cinema,
HF/LB/+, \$19.00 ppd., 78m 54s*

Dr. Charles Taylor (Fernando Rey) approaches a local medical board to request the use of a human subject to test his latest discovery: a new kind of plastic for reconstructive surgery, which adheres to skin while adopting its color and texture. His request is denied, but overheard by Norma Borden (Lisa Gaye), a disfigured mental patient with violent tendencies,

who stows away in his car and begs to participate in his experiments. Taylor successfully repairs Norma's face, but upon learning her status as a mental patient, tries to turn her into the authorities—prompting her to attack him and escape. Adopting a new identity as "Laura Black," a hotel waitress, Norma is romanced by a millionaire (Virgilio Teixeira), unaware that her beauty must be moistened regularly with a special formula (in very short supply!) or resume its original hideousness.

Horror films with a plastic surgery angle are hard to resist, and hard to screw up, and this Mexican/American co-production—**La Cara del Terror**—is reasonably entertaining, despite some hard-to-ignore rough edges. Director Isidoro Martinez Ferry—credited here with the



ludicrous pseudonym "William Hole, Jr."—decided that his film would play better in the United States without dubbing, and so recorded most of the English dialogue live on-set. While the actors' lines are generally understandable, their performances seem wholly unnatural as a result. Whereas the distinguished Rey flounders badly, Gaye is

much more adept and manages an intriguing, if stiff, portrayal. Only Conchita Cuetos (who plays Rey's rather sisterly wife) seems completely at ease with the language. The story is also padded with enjoyable interludes of Mexican rock 'n roll, flamenco dancing, and even a theme song as Gaye walks the streets, taking pleasure in the

way her healed face attracts men. The B&W photography is adequate, and José Buenagu's dolorous horn score recalls the music of Jess Franco's similarly-themed **THE DIABOLICAL DR. Z** [*Miss Muerte*, 1966].

Most of the film's credits are Anglicized, and this version appears to be complete, regardless of published accounts of an 83m running time. Sinister Cinema's 16mm source print is also in very good condition, though at two points, the footage is briefly interrupted by black frames, which appear to be leftover markers for TV commercial breaks. Preceded by an unusually entertaining group of trailers for **CURSE OF THE BLOOD-GHOULS** (aka **SLAUGHTER OF THE VAMPIRES**), **THE CORPSE VANISHES** and **THE DIABOLICAL DR. Z**. —TL

FROM BEIJING WITH LOVE

1994, Tai Seng [US]/Bravo [Can.] (2 tapes), HF/LB, \$79.98 [US], 82m 37s

Tai Seng/Bravo/Cameron Entertainment #EL035/EL036 (LD), D/MA/LB, \$210.00 [US]

Disappointed by the choice of Pierce Brosnan as the new 007? Well, how about Stephen Chiau Sing-chi? HK's reigning king of *mo lei tau* slapstick stars here as bumbling Mainland pork vendor/superspy Ling Ling-chai (whose name sounds like "007" but literally means "Frozen Frozen Rain") in this violent, chaotic Bond send-up, which he co-directed with Richard Lee Lik-chi (**FLIRTING SCHOLAR**). When the skull of China's only dinosaur fossil is purloined by a renegade calling himself "The Man With the Golden Gun" (Wong Kum-kong), Ling is dispatched to HK in pursuit, oblivious to the fact that his

contact—an assassin named Siu-kam (an amusingly stoic Anita Yuen Wing-yee)—has been ordered to liquidate him. Soon realizing that Ling's unbounded luck and unmatched stupidity make him invincible, Siu-kam switches sides with ensuing events leading the pair back to China for a final clash with Ling's superior who is, in actuality, the armor-clad menace they seek.

Though it makes no attempt to poke fun at the large-scale stunts and chase sequences for which the Bond cycle is noted, other ingredients receive a good skewering. The requisite lampoon of the series' fashionable title sequences is accompanied by riffs on the Bond theme that are later joined by sportive variations on Ennio Morricone's score for **THE UNTOUCHABLES** (which works quite well in this context). Ling preps for the mission by watching bootleg Bond videos (an unauthorized clip from **MOONRAKER** is shown) while character actor Law Kar-ying plays China's answer to "Q", cooking up hopeless inventions like the world's first solar-powered flashlight (!). As for *femme fatales*, former softcore star Pauline Chan Po-lin receives prominent billing (but little screen time) as a rival agent, with flame-throwers built into her breastplate, who is partnered with a "Jaws" lookalike. In marked departure from recent HK releases, wherein the coming reunification with China has resulted in a new era of political correctness, the Mainland characters here are all dense, corrupt or just plain psychotic. Although there are a number of universally appreciable moments, the proceedings get awfully bloody for a parody and the film lacks the visual stimulation of Chiau's period fantasy spoofs.

Nonetheless, the substantial success of **FROM BEIJING WITH LOVE (Guo chan Ling Lingqi)**—literally, "Country-Made Frozen Frozen Rain") on its home turf prompted Chiau to continue poking fun at Western fare in Wai Man-yip's **SIXTY MILLION DOLLAR MAN** (1995) where sendups of **THE MASK**, **TERMINATOR 2: JUDGMENT DAY** and **PULP FICTION** provide the only laughs in one of the comedian's weakest films to date.

The Cantonese and Mandarin tape sets (which present the 1.85:1 frame at about 1.75:1) are mastered from a slightly worn but acceptable 35mm print source. The disc set (a separate jacket for each platter) utilizes a Cantonese digital/Mandarin analog sound set-up (the latter marred by patches of distortion), presenting the same transfer on three CLV sides. Also available in the new Video CD-I format for \$33.25. —JC

GOD OF GAMBLERS 2

1994, Tai Seng Video
(Bravo in Canada),
\$79.98 (2 tapes), 123m 51s

Fans of Wong Jing's **GOD OF GAMBLERS** (1990) will likely be amused by this, the third sequel, which is cast from the same schizophrenic mold as the original. For the uninitiated, the second and third movies followed the (largely) comedic exploits of Andy Lau and Stephen Chiau Sing-chi, respectively. This latest movie, however, returns its focus to the true God of Gamblers, the unparalleled Ko Chun (Chow Yun-fat).

Now wealthy, retired and living with his pregnant wife on a farm in France, Ko Chun is left an estate worth \$16,000,000,000 and instructed to oversee its distribution to various world

charities. On the heels of this announcement, his home is seized by Chiau Siu Chee, a lesser gambler who intends to usurp Ko's mantle as "God of Gamblers," as well as the fortune to which he has been entrusted. What follows is an entertaining and excessive gun battle that recalls the glory days of HK "Heroic Bloodshed" cinema, while serving up another tasteless moment courtesy of Wong Jing, when the invaders abort Ko's unborn son from its mother's womb, leaving the fetus in a clear jar upon the mantle and his mortally wounded wife sprawled across the dining room table! (Don't even ask about the cat on a leash that get's dragged from a moving car!)

After promising his dying wife that he will not gamble, nor will he reveal his true identity for one year, Ko embarks on a bizarre adventure that takes him from mainland China to Taiwan, where he befriends the leader of a faltering triad empire also at odds with Chiau. This "middle section" is too long for it's own good, even with the attempts of co-stars Tony Leung Ka-fai and Chingmy Yau to kick-start the tired material. Things get back on course once the two opposing masters commence their gambling showdown in a Taiwanese casino. Who would think that watching two men playing cards could be such riveting entertainment?

While we can't be certain, we figured we'd stir up a little controversy and suggest that Wong Jing's decision to ignore the previous two installments, and to give his villain a name similar to that of HK megastar Stephen Chiau Sing-chi, is a little more than coincidental. This correlation between these two factors could also be completely wrong, but we have to

admit that our suspicions were aroused!

Tai Seng's tapes look fine, letterboxed at approximately 1.75:1, and the sound is terrific, whether it be in Cantonese or Mandarin. We're still not fans however, of Tai Seng's decision to spread their "big name" titles over two tapes, when a T-130 would do. For Chow Yun-fat fans who can't to see if he will appear in **ALIEN 4** as rumored, **GOD OF GAMBLERS 2** is a suitable means of passing the time. —ES

HE'S A WOMAN, SHE'S A MAN

1994, *Tai Seng* [US]/*Bravo* [Can.]
#1577 (2 tapes), HF/LB, \$79.98
[US], 106m 19s
Tai Seng/Bravo/Fitto Mobile
#FML1001A/FML1001B (LD)
D/MA/LB, \$210.00 [US]

In short order, the United Filmmakers' Organization has become one of HK's premiere production companies and Peter Chan Ho-sun's **Jin zhi xu yie** ("Golden Branch, Jade Leaves"), a hip redo of **VICTOR/VICTORIA**, has emerged as one of UFO's most honored and successful releases to date. It is also the most amusing and likeable comedy in some time, unreeling with the sort of congenial vigor absent from the largely witless and formula-bound Hollywood product of late. Obsessed with pop music diva Rose (Carina Lau Kar-ling), incorrigible tomboy Lam Gee-wing (Anita Yuen Wing-yee) disguises herself as a guy to meet her idol at an audition for male singers, which is being staged by Rose's boyfriend/producer Sam (Leslie Cheung Kwok-wing). However, "pop's perfect couple" are at a crossroads in their relationship and Sam signs the talentless "boy" to a recording contract to

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spite his temperamental girlfriend. Moving into their lives (and soon their home), Gee-wing cheerfully provides the veneration, pampering and support that both Sam and Rose desperately crave and soon they rekindle their love—for *her*!

This comedy/drama of errors is sincerely performed by a proficient cast that consistently hits the right notes, even down to some of the rather broad supporting characters, such as

Sam's unabashedly gay image consultant "Auntie" (Eric Tsang Chi-wai, in a performance that stops just short of being an unmannerly caricature). However, the film's ace-in-the-hole is multi-talented Anita Yuen Wing-yee (in one of at least *thirteen* starring roles she essayed in 1994, a year that also saw her playing spies, assassins, a master safecracker, a nerdy movie addict, a fortune-hunting moll and an unbalanced mortician,

in addition to more conventional female leads in a horde of romantic comedy/dramas); her unbridled energy and convincingly male persona netted her "Best Actress" at the 1995 HK Film Awards. However, one needs to be somewhat familiar with the HK entertainment industry to appreciate the considerable humor found in Sam's attempt to come to grips with his sexual confusion, which derives its laughs from the casting of Cheung (a pop star on the level of Elvis, whose sexual preferences are a gossip staple in tabloids) as well as the script's witty takes on both the music industry (where capability takes a back seat to marketability) and fan culture (a world of monomaniacal devotion with no parallel in the West).

The transfer isn't always sharp, but is fairly good overall with a slightly hazy image and minor wear on the print. The ratio is 1.85:1, but mild cropping of the English subtitles reveals that the image is somewhat zoomboxed; regardless, the framing is always acceptable. The English subtitles have been prepared with more eloquence than usual, allowing the verbal humor to come across with ease. Tai Seng and Bravo offer both Cantonese and Mandarin tape sets; as the film was shot with sync sound, the former is definitely preferable, though the location recording and overdubs vary in quality throughout. The bilingual Fitto Mobile laserdisc set (that label's first release) presents the same transfer on three CLV sides in two jackets with a Cantonese digital/Mandarin analog sound set-up. A single-disc "no-name" bootleg version derived from the same master tape has also surfaced in some outlets. —JC

HOLOGRAM MAN

1994, PM Entertainment Group
#PM 263, HF/S/CC, NSR,
101m 4s

This shabby pastiche of elements from **DEMOLITION MAN** and **THE LAWNMOWER MAN** stars TV Tarzan Joe Lara as Decoda, a pony-tailed cop on the trail of psychotic terrorist Norman "Slash" Gallagher (beefy co-writer/associate producer Evan Lurie) whose gang has rescued his consciousness from stasis imprisonment, allowing him to wreak havoc as an indestructible, ionized killer. After being mortally wounded, Decoda undergoes the same holographic transformation process, facing off with Slash on his own plane *mano a mano*.

Set in a totalitarian L.A. that seems to consist primarily of office building lobbies and factory basements filled with breakaway furniture, this low-watt entry gives director Richard Pepin the chance to do a variation on his company's stock action formula. In practice, this means that some discount computer animation and a cheesy matte painting have been tossed into the standard mix of car crashes and shootouts, where opponents obligingly step out into the open to be picked off. Although it's difficult to completely hate a movie that casts lumpy comedian Derek McGrath as a mealy-mouthed emancipator, this makes the cement-headed satire of **DEMOLITION MAN** seem positively Swiftian. Strictly for those who gauge a movie's quality by the amount of stuff that blows up real good.

The transfer is soft and hazy throughout, with dull color. Only the musical score has stereo separations and there are instances of audio dropout. The box shortchanges the running

time, listing only 96m and indicates that the film is Closed Captioned, though our screening copy was not. —JC

MICROSCOPIC LIQUID SUBWAY TO OBLIVION

1970, Video Search of Miami,
LB, \$27.90 ppd., 84m 34s

Here's one for the collector who has everything: a remnant of Italian psychedelia—written, produced and directed by someone using the Nabokovian pseudonym "John W. Shadow," who also co-wrote four of the songs. British science professor John Fink (Alex J. Rebar) and his wife Elizabeth (Ewa Aulin) invite some students to join them on holiday at a secluded Italian villa. One of the students is the disruptive trouble-maker Billy (Carlo De'Mejo), a heroin addict whom Mr. Fink hopes to rehabilitate as a kind of science project with the help of teacher's pet Henry (Eugene Pomero). When Fink hides Billy's syringe and hilariously taunts his spell of withdrawal, the student retaliates by getting *Elizabeth* hooked (wha?); later, the despondent Billy decides to straighten himself out by tying himself to a bed and going cold turkey, but Fink seeks revenge by sustaining his addiction with covert injections. Good intentions ultimately prevail, albeit to disastrous ends.

It's hard to tell whose side this movie is on. Shadow's technique is bizarre and youth-oriented (his approach to filming an argument in a car is to drown out the words with loud music, while zooming in-and-out from different sides of the windshield... *in slow motion!*), yet, his script is misinformed in ways that only a genuinely conservative work could be, depicting heroin as an hallucinogen that makes its users see wild colors,



Ewa Aulin takes a hard ride on the
MICROSCOPIC LIQUID SUBWAY TO OBLIVION.

act silly and feel horny. Some striking moments occur nonetheless, such as Billy's attempt to play a casual game of billiards as his veins are screaming out for junk, or the insane climax in which Fink—taking his first ride on the “microscopic liquid subway to oblivion”—is shown trying to steer a car as a dense collage occludes his windshield. The beautiful Aulin—erstwhile star of **DEATH SMILES ON A MURDERER**, **CANDY** and **PLUCKED**—gives the only real performance. The director of photography is, of all people, the great Gabor Pogany—who shot **THE SINS OF ROME** [*Spartaco*, 1952], *Beatrice Cenci* (1956) and **DOUBLE FACE** [*A doppia faccia*, 1968] for Riccardo Freda, and **THE GOLDEN ARROW** [*L'arciere delle mille e una notte*, 1961] for Antonio Margheriti. Believe it or not, there *is* a theme song, sung by Ronnie Jones, but most of the music is Morriconian aria meanderings, credited to Conti and Marcello Giganti.

This is a better-than-average-quality VSoM release, dubbed in English with Greek subtitles printed on the picture. A few early college scenes in

this Technicolor film were shot in sepia-toned B&W for no apparent reason, perhaps a reference to Lindsay Anderson's academic revolutionary fantasy **IF...** (1969). The image is letterboxed at 1.75:1, but the half-offscreen credits indicate that the original Greek release was a cropboxed transfer of an anamorphic gauge print. —TL

NEW LEGEND OF SHAOLIN

1994, Best Friend Films Ltd.,
NSR, 95m

Knowing a good trend when he sees it, Jet Li is at it again, reinventing another popular Chinese folk hero for today's audiences. This time it's Hung Sey-kwan, who was perhaps best personified by Chen Kuo-tai in several Shaw Brothers martial arts features from the 1970s. The film itself is pretty good, far better than the disappointing **Fong Sai-yuk II** or the wildly uneven **TAI CHI MASTER**. The martial arts are also well done, and while the wire trickery is obvious in spots, it isn't as flagrant as it has been in some other recent features. Screen siren Chingmy Yau stars

opposite Li as the combination love interest/foil for Hung Sey-kwan, and does an admirable job in the process.

Eight years after the destruction of Shaolin, lone survivor Hung Sey-kwan and his son Ma Ting become involved in a quest for the Ming treasure, the map to which is tattooed on the backs of five young disciples of a reborn underground Shaolin organization. Much of the father and son relationship is obviously cribbed from the **BABY CART** series by director Wong Ching; in fact, a few scenes (including a key sequence at the beginning of the picture) are virtual carbon-copies from the legendary series. Hung's deadly expertise with his spear comes in handy when he finally confronts his arch-enemy Ma Ling-yee, the betrayer of Shaolin Temple. Ma is virtually invincible thanks to his “poisonous kung-fu,” which has caused him to mutate into something less than human. To top things off, he usually tears about in a vehicle that looks something like an oversized metallic conch shell!

The tape is subtitled in English and is mildly letterboxed at 1.66:1. Keep an eye open at the end for a joke involving none other than Fong Sai-yuk! We're not certain, but we're pretty sure that Fong is none other than director Wong Jing, who is known for indulging in Hitchcockian cameos. —ES

MY FATHER IS A HERO

1994, Tai Seng Video (Bravo in Canada), \$79.98, 104m 36s

Though it shares its title with an embarrassing Gérard Depardieu flick, we were surprised by how much we liked this recent Jet Li outing. Li (who seems to have a new release every other month) teams up once again

with **Fong Sai Yuk** director Corey Yuen Kwai for this tale of a mainland undercover cop whose infiltration of a vicious crime ring endangers the life of his young son. Anita Mui co-stars as a HK detective who is pulled into the investigation when she believes Li to truly be the fugitive he is impersonating. Despite the expected sentimental scenes that deal with the father-son relationship, the movie provides a commendable balance of motion and emotion. Yuen Kwai's skill at assembling an action scene is still among the finest in HK, even if he doesn't always take the plot too seriously, often preferring to ride his material right over the top. Two exceptional scenes of this sort include the double-cross that erupts into a small scale war at a crowded mall, as well as the climactic battle aboard the villains' boat. In short, it's a lightweight, well-made actioner that has a few surprises up its sleeves.

Once again, Tai Seng has spread the movie across two nice looking tapes (each cassette has a different cover for its respective hardshell case), though the feature could have been easily contained on a single T-120 cassette. The English subtitles are always legible, and the image is letterboxed at 1.75:1. —ES

THE RETURNING

1994, *Tai Seng* [US]/*Bravo* [Can.] #1627 (2 tapes), +, \$79.98 [US], 97m 23s
Tai Seng/Bravo/Cameron Entertainment #EL024/EL025 (LD), D/MA/LB, \$210.00 [US]

In interviews with HK publications, director Jacob Cheung Chi-leung (**CAGEMAN**) has stated that **THE RETURNING** (*Deng zhe ni hui lai*—"Waiting

For You to Come Back"), is his tribute to the age of suggestive Chinese horror thrillers like Yuan Quifeng's 1961 Shaw Brothers' classic **Ye bang ge sheng** ("The Midnight Song," which features a storyline similar to **PHANTOM OF THE OPERA** and was just remade by Ronny Yu Yan-tai as **THE PHANTOM LOVER** [1995]). Unfortunately, it has neither the passion nor the shocks to succeed at this laudable ambition.

HARD BOILED's Tony Leung Chiu-wai stars as Lee, a literary editor obsessed with the writings of Siu Lau, a female author who committed suicide in 1949. Seeking to find the right atmosphere to create a compilation of her work, he and long-time girlfriend Elaine (**EAT DRINK MAN WOMAN**'s Wu Chien-lien) move into Siu's last place of residence. Elaine is soon plagued by all manner of inexplicable happenings, which culminate in her possession by Siu's spirit. When Lee's preoccupation with his subject becomes all-consuming, both his and Elaine's identities begin to ebb away.

The storyline respectfully proceeds through the ghost-house paces, presenting all manner of creaky cupboards, phantom footprints and self-operating phonographs, while a spectral chorus swells periodically on the soundtrack. An effective moment is managed here and there but, by and large, this decorous production limps along to little or no effect, a victim of its creator's single-minded nostalgia and intemperate notions on how to generate atmosphere and suspense. Leung and Wu, however, offer well-rounded portrayals and the development of their characters' increasing romantic friction (heightened by the successfully offbeat casting of comedienne

Sandra Ng Kwan-yu as the couple's third-wheel friend, who can no longer mask her attraction to Lee) is effective and in-keeping with Cheung's more thoughtful work.

In contrast to the norm for recent HK releases, the 1.85:1 frame is presented here in dead center fullscreen with 1.75:1 credit sequences. It's possible that the telecine operator felt the film's hazy look and muted colors would read better if brought up as close to the screen as possible. Whatever the rationale, visual compositions are not fatally harmed, though the cropping usually plays hob with the English subtitles (which are also outside the "TV Safe" area and may not appear onscreen, depending on your monitor's degree of overscan). The double tape set is available in Cantonese and Mandarin editions (the former being preferable as this was shot with sync sound) which include the film's 2m 10s theatrical trailer (also at 1.75:1). The Cantonese digital/Mandarin analog Cameron Entertainment LD set (two jackets/three CLV sides and reportedly in widescreen) is also available. —JC

THE SECRET LIFE OF TOM THUMB

1993, *Manga Entertainment*, HF/S, \$29.95, 57m 25s

Two years in the making, this dark, hour-long fantasy is a disturbing fusion of traditional stop-motion animation and pixilation (stop motion with human models) techniques. Conceived, written and directed by Bristol-based animator Dave Borthwick, the film is set in a bizarre post-industrial landscape where people live in insect-trampled squalor, save for a mysterious toymaker who breeds mutants in his antiseptic, machine-driven



Nick Upton and son in Dave Borthwick's *THE SECRET LIFE OF TOM THUMB*.

laboratorium. After an insect gums up the works in the artificial insemination division, a working-class couple (Nick Upton, Deborah Collard) give birth to a tiny, tadpole-faced boy named Tom, who is then abducted and returned to the lab, where obscure computer screens “delete” his mother. The cooing, wonderstruck Tom explores the lab, and is escorted to freedom by a weird, half-metallic, half-reptilian creature. Emerging from a pipe near a toxic dump, Tom’s savior is shot on sight by Jack the Giant Killer (who greatly resembles the doll form of the Cyclops in Nathan Juran’s film of the same name), the tiny leader of a rebellious tribe of Tom’s own diminutive proportions. Tom is adopted by Jack, unaware that his widowed father is stumbling through a senseless life toward their inevitable reunion.

Borthwick has said that “people spend too much time

trying to understand movies and not enough time feeling them,” but we liked the feelings awakened by his movie less than the avenues of thought it opened for us. The film—which a coda scene explains may have been a prenatal memory—appears to be a rumination on why we’re born into certain families, what compels us to form certain friendships, and why in some cases water is actually thicker than blood. Borthwick shows that any landscape, no matter how miserable, could be tolerable given the company of a certain familiar face. And the landscape here is miserable indeed, beholden to those of The Brothers Quay and David Lynch, with the pixilation of its human figures giving the whole experience the jitters of an unwashed, booze-soaked, *delirium tremens* nightmare. Inarticulate, nebulous and completely vulnerable, Tom is an endearing little trooper who

(unlike the **ERASERHEAD** baby to which he’s often been compared) actually appeals to our parental instincts; we are restlessly concerned about him, not only because he’s cute, but because he’s the only thing in this film we understand as unconditionally as a parent loves its child. The score—featuring contributions by John Paul Jones and Startled Insects, and sound design by Andy Kennedy—often lends a fragile, koto-like simplicity and lyricism to the otherwise crushingly oppressive atmospherics.

THE SECRET LIFE OF TOM THUMB has received numerous international film awards, including Best Director at the 1993 Sitges International Film Festival, and a British Academy Award for Best Short Film of 1994. Manga Entertainment’s tape is of excellent quality, with a nicely directional stereo soundtrack, but the film is just

the right length to make a splendid CAV laserdisc release someday. —TL

THE SWORD OF MANY LOVES

1993, *Tai Seng* [US]/*Bravo* [Can.] #1480 (2 tapes), LB, \$79.98 [US], 110m 18s

Tai Seng/Bravo/Universe #ULV 3319/ULV 3320 (LD), D/MA/LB, \$210.00 [US]

Poon Man-kit's ***Fei hu wai zhuan*** ("Legend of Flying Fox") is something of a ringer in the recent wave of HK period fantasies, presenting its parable of revenge, romantic tragedy and the supernatural with a greater emphasis on character and a less ornate visual style. However, like other adaptations of works by noted fantasy/swordplay author Jin Yong/"Louis Cha" (including such disparate films as King Hu Chin-chuan's **SWORDSMAN** [*Xiao ao jiang hu*, 1991] and Wong Kar-wai's **ASHES OF TIME** [*Dong xie xi du*—"Evil East, Poisonous West," 1994]), the plot consists of plausible circumstances and conflicts affecting characters possessing mystical skills, creating a remarkable hybrid world. Foot-loose swordsman Wu Fei (Leon Lai Ming) finds trouble awaiting him in Nanking when he crosses paths with Fung Nam-tin (Elvis Tsui Kum-kong), an elder statesman whose obsessive love for his homicidal idiot son brings about the death of Wu's partner. Soon joining Wu in his quest for vengeance is Purple Yuen (Sharla Cheung Man), a disguised nun who is actually Fung's daughter-by-rape. She seeks to avenge her dead mother but is distracted by her increasing attraction to Wu. Completing this romantic triangle-in-the-making is Ching Ling-ling (Michelle Lee Kar-yan,

aka Michelle Reis), a callow Poison Mistress who is determined to have Wu even if she has to transform him into a pig!

As always, the action choreography cheerfully defies all known laws of gravity and is rendered here with rousing ingenuity. Lensed on fresh Mainland locales, this entry eschews the fairytale vistas of recent Hong Kong productions in favor of a deglamorized, naturalistic look more akin to the '60s Taiwanese films of King Hu Chin-chuan. Bracketing the central conflict is an abundance of broad but often clever humor that reaches its zenith during Wu and Ling-ling's comic duel with two rival poisoners (played with zeal by Ho Kar-kui and Yuen King-tan), a marvelous combination of exotic spells and accomplished FX trickery. Pop superstar Lai is expressive and likable, but it is Lee who really shines in a much weightier role than the decorative characters she generally essays. Cheung and Tsui (respectively, the ubiquitous leading lady and villain of the genre) do well by roles that allow them to expand on character types they have played numerous times this decade. While the script displays unexpected degrees of tenderness, the film's violence quotient runs an uneasy gamut from comical exaggeration (there are more giant lumps on display than in 10 Warner toons!) to ferocious intensity (in particular, the evisceration of a little boy whose death has been abbreviated in the print used here).

In welcome contrast to the norm, the English subtitles have been prepared with care and are visible and legible throughout. The *Tai Seng/Bravo* Cantonese and Mandarin tape sets and the bilingual (Cantonese digital/Mandarin analog) *Universe* disc set (three CLV sides/separate

sleeves) utilize the same 1.80:1 transfer and the film's mix of muted, earthy tones and low-key lighting comes off better on the latter. Aside from some censorship in the opening reel, the source material has no major flaws. While the Chinese synopsis on the tape box is correct, the English write-up mistakenly lists Michael Mak Dong-kit (**BUTTERFLY & SWORD**) as director. Also available in the new CD-I format for \$33.25. —JC

THE THREE SWORDSMEN

(*Dao jian xiao*)

1994, *Tai Seng* Cassette set (2 tapes), HF/LB, \$79.98, 85m 36s

Tai Seng/Universe Laser and Video Co. #ULV 3405/ULV 3406 (LD), D/MA/LB, \$210

This convoluted but agreeable fantasy/comedy/adventure stars Andy Lau Tak-hwa as the colorful warrior Siu Sam-siu who is set to face noted opponent and compatriot Ming Jian (played by Brigitte Lin Ching-hsia with a dubbed male voice) in a showdown to decide who is the foremost swordsman in the martial world. The competition is put on hold when Siu is framed for murder and finds himself pursued by resolute lawman Wham Dao (ubiquitous villain Elvis Tsui Kum-kong in a rare heroic role). The Ming family comes to his aid but a traitor in their ranks hatches a plot that forces Siu and Ming Jian into a climactic duel to the death, in order to facilitate the release of the former's fiancée.

Released simultaneously to North American theatres and video outlets, this endearingly odd effort suffers from a familiar downside of HK cinema: poorly translated English subtitles which



Robert Englund acts for your sins in TOBE HOOPER'S NIGHT TERRORS.

frequently disappear into white backgrounds. That said, director Taylor Wong Tai-loi (**DEADLY DREAM WOMAN**) keeps things fast and funny enough to help retain the attention of English speaking viewers distanced by the muddled storyline. For what will apparently be her cinematic bow, Lin has chosen a role that harkens back to one of her most unusual portrayals: male hero "Jia Bao-yu" in Li Han-hsiang's adaptation of the Chinese literary warhorse **DREAM OF THE RED CHAMBER** (a role she would reprise for a subsequent TV version). This offbeat casting and Lin's consistent success in such eccentric roles heightens the interest level of both a throwaway character and a relatively minor film.

A bilingual (Cantonese digital/Mandarin analog) presentation on three CLV sides packaged in two separate jackets, this features an average quality transfer from a slightly worn print source. The image is approximately 1.75:1 cropped by 1.80:1 matting with the English subtitles occasionally bisected by the video matte. The Universe release and a double cassette version are available domestically from Tai Seng (US) and Bravo Communications (Canada-wholesale only). —JC

TOBE HOOPER'S NIGHT TERRORS

1993, Cannon Video, D/S/SS, NSR, 97m 34s

Twenty-odd years ago, producer Harry Alan Towers was

making deranged international fare like this with director Jess Franco, some of it inspired by the writings of the Marquis de Sade—**DEADLY SANCTUARY** [*Justine*, 1968] and the seemingly lost **EUGENIE, THE STORY OF HER JOURNEY INTO PERVERSION** [*De Sade 70*, 1969], to name two. This attempt to resurrect their non-linear, psychedelic, Sadean experiments is unfortunately more influenced by Ken Russell's **LAIR OF THE WHITE WORM** (1988) than by Franco's films, which benefitted from an actual reading and understanding of the notorious philosopher. The result is the umpteenth movie to declare that De Sade's writings are the "opposite of everything" that's been said about them, while

depicting his disciples as the usual aesthetic, pony-tailed goons.

The movie opens in the 18th Century, with De Sade (Robert Englund) imprisoned in a rat-infested prison, being tortured with acid eyedrops, torturing others, mooning over a portrait of the woman who betrayed him, and never once picking up a pen. Without explanation, the story shifts to the present day, as Genie (Zoe Trilling) travels to Alexandria, Egypt, to spend time with her father, Dr. Matteson (William Finley), one of the world's leading archaeologists. When Matteson is summoned away by the excavation of a tomb containing artifacts which may explain the origins of Christianity, Genie is lured into the company of a strange triad: Sabina (Alona Kimhi), a bisexual drug addict; Mahmoud (Juliano Merr), a handsome Bedouin horseman; and Paul Chevalier (Englund), a wealthy descendant of the Marquis de Sade. Separately and together, they initiate her into a world ruled by the Marquis' writings, decadent parties, hallucinatory and sexual experience, and thrill-kills.

Daniel Matmor and Rom Globus' script is loosely based on Sade's *EUGÉNIE DE FRANVAL* (a short story previously filmed by Franco as *Eugénie* [1970], a much superior film starring Soledad Miranda), and it juggles its various locations and time frames well; it is most interesting while balancing Genie's reading of Sade's *PHILOSOPHY IN THE BOUDOIR* with cutaways to the complementary tombs of her father's expedition and Sade's Bastille prison cell. Trilling (who bears a strong resemblance to Linda Hamilton) makes an okay heroine, but the movie is really a showcase for its male stars. Robert Englund

delivers a studied Vincent Price impression as Chevalier, replete with self-satisfied "hms," but gives one of his better performances—aching and venomous—as the Marquis de Sade... quite a compliment when one considers that it couldn't be less historically accurate. (Sade was actually quite pampered in prison.) But the real treat is the presence of William Finley, making a welcome return to the fantastic cinema after a long absence. A early confederate of Hooper and Brian De Palma, Finley moved from a stylish role in *SISTERS* (1973) to the *tour de force* lead in *PHANTOM OF THE PARADISE* (1974), then slid into minor albeit memorable character roles in *EATEN ALIVE* (1977), *THE FURY* (1978) and *THE FUNHOUSE* (1980) before disappearing altogether from the screen. (The last time I saw him was on THE DAVID SUSSKIND SHOW—an anonymous, civilian appearance about a topic unrelated to cinema.) In a relatively minor role, Finley demonstrates a technical knowledge of film acting that no one else in this movie approaches, and gives further evidence that he is one of the few film actors of his generation conceivably touched with genius. If Elisha Cook or Milton Parsons or Skelton Knaggs could somehow miraculously return from the grave to act again, I couldn't be happier than I am to see William Finley in another movie.

Hooper's direction is slick and competent but, despite having Sade's collected works at his disposal, he pulls his punches and deliberately avoids the danger and claustrophobia of his earliest, homespun horror films. Instead, we get Englund on a cross, a lot of snakes, and a naked snake woman dipped in gold paint. As with Hooper's

recent **THE MANGLER**, the film's greatest technical strength is the lush cinematography of Amnon Salomon, slightly cropped here from its original 1.85:1 ratio. Cannon's digitally processed tape looks and sounds very good indeed. The box carries an R rating, surprising as the film contains full frontal male nudity (wagging in slow motion, no less!) and wallows in a gleefully unhealthy atmosphere of sex, violence, and (oh yes) depravity. —TL

TREASURE HUNT

1994, Long Shong Video (Taiwan), NSR, 105m

Although it received mixed reviews from the Asian press, this is a refreshing change of pace from the current crop of HK releases. What makes the film work better than it really should is the presence of the ever-charismatic Chow Yun-fat, who carries the film with his performance. The movie itself might seem a little confused at times, but director Jeff Lau is most consistent in making films that aren't quite sure what they want to be!

Chow stars as Chang, a US government agent posing as a UCLA professor who, despite appearances, is more American than Chinese. Following an explosive shootout, Chang is sent to China to steal a "treasure" for the US government, which turns out to be a young woman named Mei who possesses unique psychic powers. Chang's contacts arrange for him to stay at the famous Shaolin Temple, where the expected culture clash starts at the drop of a GameBoy. Before the inevitable confrontation with the enemy agents, Chang and the monks mutually benefit from their time together; he learns more about himself

and his background, while they get to learn baseball—complete with uniforms that read “SHAOLIN” on the back. Toss in a few bizarre instances where Mei shows off her powers to Chang (his fist grows to gigantic proportions, flowers grow out of his head, and the two go for a midnight flight), and you’ve got a movie that puts a smile on your face while it careens all over the map. **TREASURE HUNT** succeeds as the holiday film it was intended to be; an engaging lightweight feature that doesn’t ask too much of its audience other than to sit back and enjoy.

Long Shong’s English subtitled tape looks good and is mildly letterboxed at 1.66:1. Two different endings reportedly exist; one reunites Chang and Mei, the other doesn’t. You’ll have to see for yourself which one is included here. —ES

VALERIE AND HER WEEK OF WONDERS

1970, Redemption Video
#RETN 023 (UK), HF, £14.99,
72m 13s (PAL)

One of the few Czechoslovakian fantasy films ever to reach an international audience, Jaromil Jires’ *Valerie a tyden divn* warrants discussion in the same breath with the works of Jean Cocteau, Georges Franju, Jean Rollin and the Brothers Quay. The peculiar, oneiric “narrative” (scripted by Jires and Ester Krumbachova) represents a dream experienced by its young heroine Valerie (Jaroslava Schallerova) on the night of her first menstruation. The orphaned daughter of a dead Bishop, Valerie lives with her cold and unfeeling grandmother Elsa (Helena Anyzkova) in a house bought at public auction. Valerie is troubled by apparitions



*The Weasel shows his true face
in VALERIE AND HER WEEK OF WONDERS.*

of a masked cleric known as the Weasel (Jiri Prymer), who seduces Elsa into selling their house—thus selling out her granddaughter’s future—with promises of restoring her youth and beauty. (The resulting vampire explains her appearance by introducing herself to Valerie as her “second cousin,” and moving in.) Valerie flees the danger into the protective arms of her boyfriend Eagle (Peter Kopriva), whom the Weasel proceeds to identify as her biological brother—the first step in a complete and devastating unmasking of her sheltered reality.

Baffling, beguiling and singularly magical in its approach, Jires’ film might be likened to a Fabergé egg with a blood-red yolk. Even at its most arcane, its imagery is uncannily successful at jangling quite specific nerves, and the film somehow appeals to one’s sense of beauty even when it documents the shadowy underbelly of unwholesome and unholy pursuits. Photographed by Jan

Curík, each shot is a superbly designed mosaic, a strikingly sensible facet of an delightfully inexplicable whole. A major component of the film’s appeal is Lubos Fiser’s lyrical score, surely one of the most beautiful to be found in the genre. The performances and makeup are deliberately naïve in execution, heightening our awareness of the proceedings as a kind of shadow play—and rather than detracting from our pleasure, this innocent quality somehow makes the dream ambience more palpable, and the ambition of Jires’ attempt all the more admirable.

Redemption has transferred this rarely-seen gem to video from one of the few English-subtitled prints ever struck. The source materials contain some scratches, and also a couple of blunt reel changes that cut preceding scenes and dialogue short (some references list an original running time of 85m), but the image quality is otherwise sharp and colorful. The mono sound is excellent. —TL



ANIME WATCHDOG

BY GREG BARR

ONE of the things Japanese animation does best is bring epics to life. The best creators of anime seem most at home when they create sagas that sweep across the screen, leaving no doubt that you have been to legendary places and witnessed heroic deeds. The productions explored in this column are among the most ambitious in scope.

ARCADIA OF MY YOUTH

1982, Japan theatrical,
AnimEigo, VHS Subtitled AT093-009, \$39.95; LD Subtitled
#AD095-003, \$59.95; 129m 51s

This sweeping space epic, conceived and directed by Leiji Matsumoto, is to Japanese animation what Akira Kurosawa's **SEVEN SAMURAI** is to live-action film. It represents a landmark in animation directorial technique and treatment of subject matter.

The known universe is being overrun by tyrannical humanoid aliens known as the Illumidus. Captain Phantom F. Harlock is commanding a ship full of refugees returning to Earth, where Mankind is now confined. His

act of wrecking the ship purposefully, while safeguarding its passengers, establishes his heroic, indomitable character in the face of oppression.

Upon his arrival, he hears the voice of Maya, his beloved, who has become the voice of Radio Free Earth. Maya, like the other female characters, is lithe with very angular facial features, almost ethereal. She wears only white robes and speaks poetically of tomorrow and of hope. "I can see the red fire of belief in the future burning in your heart," she tells Harlock from beyond the grave.

Maya and many others die in this tragedy. There aren't any moments of comic relief, although one central figure is comically drawn. The character of Tochiro looks cartoonish and his expressions, unlike any of the others, are often drawn in a deliberately distorted manner.

Tochiro is a master mechanic who has been able to create, and keep concealed, the space-going vessel that will become Harlock's flagship. The flag flown by this space cruiser is the skull-and-crossbones. It plays a central role in this story about honor, sacrifice, loyalty and individuality. Matsumoto's drama centers on Man's essential

solitude. In Harlock he has created a character who would rather face the vastness of space alone than to be in the company of those who would betray him and the ideal of freedom.

The canvas of **ARCADIA OF MY YOUTH** stretches from immense galactic backdrops or terrestrial landscapes to lingering close-ups of Harlock's left eye and his cheek scar just below it. The animators have treated the production like a live-action film. Some scenes are shown as if shot from multiple camera angles, a running sequence in the passageway of the spaceship is shown from the character's perspective, and a slow pan lingers on the starship Arcadia as it rises dramatically from its underground hiding place.

ARCADIA OF MY YOUTH is unrelenting in its portrayal of oppression and desperation. The pacing is also a far cry from the quick editing and practically non-stop action Western audiences have grown accustomed to. The camera lingers on the immobile face of Harlock until he decides upon his reaction. Yet there is



no dearth of fist or fire fights, tense hostage confrontations, or escapes from threatening galactic phenomenon. When the climactic starship duel between Harlock and the Illuminus Commander finally comes it has been worth every moment of development. This is

a momentous clash between two samurai warlords in the best bushido tradition, on a scale to rival the grandest battle scenes on film.

As usual, AnimEigo brings both accurate and literate English to the subtitles, although naturally nuance and some

depth are lost. AnimEigo also provides some good liner notes on a separate sheet that includes all song lyrics in both Japanese and English.

Anime is at its best when it tackles heroic themes and sweeping landscapes, when it brings myths alive—whether they are from Oriental tradition or modern speculation. From its realistic flying sequences to its imaginative portrayal of an alternate future, there are only a few, such as Hayao Miyazaki, who can best Matsumoto's **ARCADIA OF MY YOUTH**.

GREEN LEGEND RAN

1992, OAV, Pioneer, D/S/CC
 Subtitling/LD Dubbed & Original
 Japanese \$99.98 #PILA-1130A
 Box Set, Episode One: 44m 54s;
 Two: 47m 9s; Three: 50m 42s

Aliens arrive at a polluted Earth and absorb the water from the oceans in a reverse terraforming operation. Our orb is transformed from a blue marble to a red dust bowl. Most survivors have reverted to a primitive existence where water is a precious commodity controlled by the Rodoists. These aliens and their human supporters are encamped in Holy Greens around artifacts in which they descended from space.

This is a fairly complex story centered on a young boy, Ran, and his relations with rebel forces and the aliens. The animation is awash in bright, bold colors. Oranges and browns dominate the landscape and the town, giving a very dry feeling to the scenes. Standing out amid this background are the bright red uniforms of the Rodo soldiers. The dreamlike sequences in which Ran remembers his youth and ill-fated mother are colored in pallid greens and blues, with yellow as

the brightest color. The conical monoliths that dropped from the heavens to alter the environment are earth-brown with a single, green-glowing "eye" at their "head."

In the first of three episodes, "Departure," Ran leaves town for the rebel's desert stronghold where he meets an unusual silver-haired girl, Aira. The motion flows smoothly and is equally at ease in dynamic action as well as placid scenes. The children behave like children, the adults like adults. A lot of thought has also gone into the design of the technology that allows the humans to survive on a now desert planet. The sands are like seas which are exploited by enterprising humans and patrolled by the armored ships of the Rodoist "Navy."

"Green 5," the second episode, begins with a gripping sequence that finds Ran stranded in the desert sands with a stalled hoverbike. The music is haunting and the sense of heat and exhaustion are tangible. The English voice actor portraying Ran does an excellent job here. In fact, all the voice talent in this dub are terrific. The Wordfit® technology used to match the lip movements to the new dialogue gives the actors a chance to concentrate on their performance rather than on the timing of their lines.

The story reminds me vividly of Frank Herbert's desert planet saga, **DUNE**. While introducing psychic elements into the storyline as Herbert did, Yu Yamamoto's screenplay goes in innovative new directions. The environmental attributes of the sand and the matching technology of the humans is showcased to great effect and contributes strongly to a credible background for the unfolding story.

At Green 5, we are introduced to a more urban setting that contrasts with the town where we first met Ran. The overall palette of the city is muted with dominant machine blues and grays. A gathering of the Rodoist bishops is underway and, in another echo with *Dune*, the bishops are portrayed as enormous, deformed mutants reminiscent of the spice navigators. The Rodoist bishops contrast strongly with their bright red costumes and purple skin features.

In the third and final episode, "Holy Green," we learn the true nature of Rodo and its plan for Earth as the humans continue to struggle for their survival. Global in scope, the climax of this story features some sumptuous backgrounds that I would love to hang on my wall.

This Pioneer laserdisc production is the best presentation of Japanese animation in the US to date. English is featured on the digital track with brilliance and clarity. The original Japanese mix is on the analog tracks and allows simultaneous comparison with the original voices. The English version of the ending theme, "Tears and Rain," is astonishingly faithful to the original Japanese song. A music video of the song is presented at the end of the third episode as part of the supplemental materials, which also include a brief video interview with director Satoshi Saga, the original Japanese promotional trailer, and a collection of still-frames featuring hundreds of sketches, cels, and backgrounds.

The Pioneer box set includes a quality T-shirt, three color sheets containing six postcards each and a 20-page booklet of archival sketches. Each episode is contained on

one disc encoded in full-feature CAV that allows still-frame perusal. The samples I checked were jitter-free.

WINDARIA

1986, Japan theatrical,
Streamline Pictures, Best Film &
Video #956, HF, \$29.95, 92m 19s

WINDARIA is a feature-length allegory in which the Japanese producers take us to a fictional land that is neither East nor West. While the characters seem Westernized, it is important to remember that the Japanese can readily identify with them as Oriental.

Carl Macek's English adaptation of the original Japanese story tells a tale of two couples in flashback. The first consists of Allan, a handsome farmer who recalls his adventure as both narrator and player, and his wife, Marie, a woman whom he forsakes at the outset of a war that destroys their country.

The other couple are of royal blood. Princess Veronica is heir to the peaceful coastal empire of Lunaria. Her doom is to be in love with Prince Roland whose father, King Draco, rules the Shadowlands. Draco, who has built a mighty military machine within his dark and mountainous country, vows to destroy Lunaria because it controls the flow of fresh water to his kingdom.

Between the two lies Allan's peaceful valley, dominated by the gigantic Tree of Life which resonates with the strong environmental themes in much of anime. **WINDARIA** is full of beautiful images of nature competently executed in animation. They range from sunlit and serene, to dark and threatening. In one transitional sequence, we are treated to a close-up of leaves from which a

colorful ladybug takes flight. In another transition, a flock of geese fly gracefully across the face of the full moon.

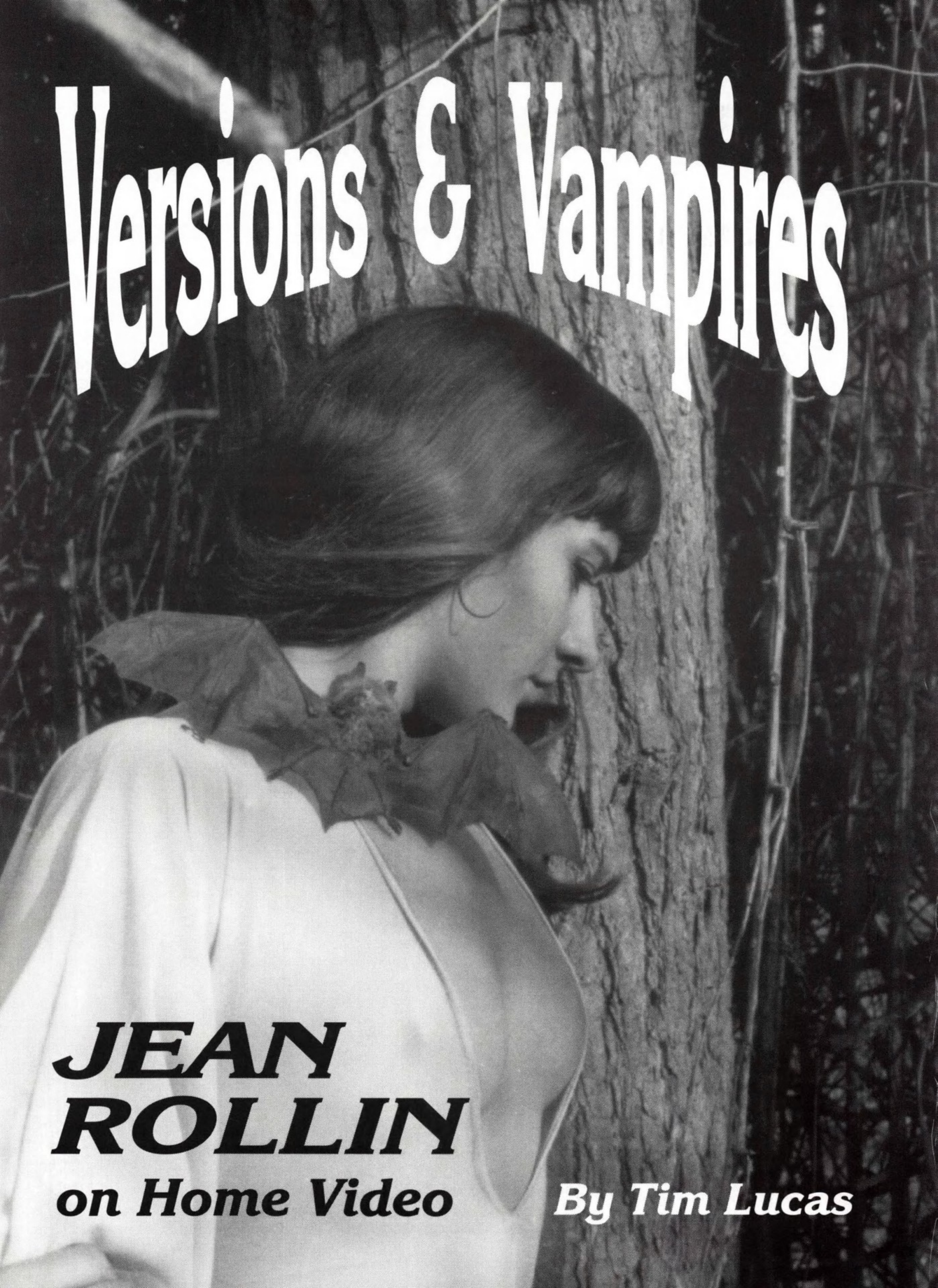
The character design is sufficiently detailed that it allows us to see the people as real rather than cartoonish. The backgrounds are richer in detail and scenes are often shot through multiple planes. The story gives viewers a bounty of symbolism. The supernatural seems to co-exist quite comfortable alongside the technological. In one stunning sequence, the soldiers of the Shadowlands must pass through a haunted forest. Inside that wood they must face the manifestation of their own nightmarish fears. In **WINDARIA** there is a unique relationship between spirit and matter made manifest by the mechanical, flying "Ship of Souls" that is the safe harbor for the "spirit birds" that emerge from dead.

There is also an amazing juxtaposition between the farmers who labor the fields manually, the Empire of Lunaria that seems arrested at a medieval technological level with wind power and crossbows, and the 20th Century military machinery of the Shadowlands. This is not a simple film where Good triumphs over Evil. It is a complicated tale of conflicting loyalties and hard lessons needed to achieve enlightenment. While there is some brief nudity and violent content, **WINDERIA** has a lot to teach older children about life. I wouldn't hesitate to recommend this as family viewing.

The dubbing is quite adequate, though the choice of voices could have reflected a wider range of ages. It is particularly disconcerting to have Allan's narration as a dying man be the same as his voice in youth.



Versions & Vampires



***JEAN
ROLLIN***

on Home Video

By Tim Lucas

A **BOUT 10 YEARS AGO**, shortly after it became possible to convert the French SECAM video signal to the NTSC standard, the films of Jean Rollin first began to circulate through the American video underground. It was an unconscionably delayed discovery for one of the purest imaginations ever consecrated to the horror genre. Rollin—whose first film, *Le Viol du Vampire* (“The Rape of the Vampire”), was made in 1968—was enamored of tradition, yet unshackled by convention; his films had a prevailing tone of innocence, while reveling in morbid and erotic excesses years before this was fashionable; it reached into the distant past for stylistic sustenance, but always in a fanciful and progressive way.

Rollin’s delicate touch was not well understood outside France, where his titles were often changed. In America, *Requiem pour un Vampire* became **CAGED VIRGINS** and *Bacchanales Sexuelles* became **FLY ME THE FRENCH WAY**, but these retitlings were nothing compared to the new titles dreamed up for Germany; there, *La Morte Vivante* (“The Living Dead Girl”) became **LADY DRACULA**, *Les Frissons du Vampire* (“The Thrills of the Vampire”) became **SEXUAL TERROR OF THE LIBERATED VAMPIRES**, *La Vampire Nue* (“The Nude Vampire”) became **LUST CASTLE OF THE GRUESOME WOMEN**, and *Les Raisins de la Mort* (“The Grapes of Death”) became **TORTURE MILL OF THE RAPED WOMEN!** Rollin’s work was never widely distributed in the United States, but the appearance of stills in various books and magazines—depicting nude vampire queens licking gore from daggers, naked blondes dangling from chains in Gothic dungeons, and strangely beautiful twins walking through ancient corridors with fangs and candelabras—whetted many an appetite to see them.

If you could get your hands on a Rollin tape, the experience of watching it was always intriguing—but also frustrating, if French wasn’t one of your languages. Now, Video Search of Miami (once a major source for those early tapes) has opted to take the high road by signing a contract

with Rollin to become the exclusive, authorized distributor of his films in North America. Seven titles are currently available: **FASCINATION**, **THE RAISINS OF DEATH**, **REQUIEM FOR A VAMPIRE**, **THE LIVING DEAD GIRL**, the sex film **BACCHANALES SEXUELLES**, **THE NUDE VAMPIRE**, and the newly released **LIPS OF BLOOD** [*Levres de Sang*, 1975].

Video Search of Miami is not the only English-speaking company to sign Rollin to a deal; in the United Kingdom, Redemption Video have issued a half-dozen titles: **REQUIEM FOR A VAMPIRE**, *Le Frisson des Vampires* and *La Vampire Nue* in dubbed English versions, and **THE LIVING DEAD GIRL**, **FASCINATION**, and *Le Viol du Vampire* in subtitled French editions. The product released by the two companies differ in a number of ways, in content as well as appearance. Redemption’s tapes benefit, first and foremost, from the sharper PAL format; they were also transferred from Betacam masters, ensuring the sharpest possible product. VSoM, unable to work from Rollin’s Betacam masters, have prepared their subtitled masters from French originals in the SECAM format, which tend to be struck from 35mm prints rather than inter-negatives. The SECAM tapes were transferred to NTSC and then subtitled, creating master tapes from which VSoM’s sale copies are struck. The generational loss resulting from this procedure has been digitally minimized, so the VSoM tapes are always adequate-looking, and some of them are quite good. Best of all, the VSoM tapes are always 100% complete and uncut—unlike Redemption’s tapes, some of which have been censored by the BBFC. VSoM also remains the only source for *La Vampire Nue* in French, with English subtitles, and all of their tapes are letterboxed and packaged in attractive, full-color clamshell boxes.

Alas, the SECAM-NTSC conversion and subtitling processes undergone by the VSoM releases has the unfortunate side effect of utterly confusing their original running times. The lengths noted below are the time-readings of the tapes themselves; while they may look shorter than the censored Redemption releases, they are always complete.

The following reviews—omitting **LIPS OF BLOOD**, which reached us too late to be included—are presented in chronological order.

THE NUDE VAMPIRE

1969, *Video Search of Miami*, HF/LB/+,
\$39.98, 80m 17s

LA VAMPIRE NUE

Redemption Video #RETN-020 (UK), HF/LB,
£12.99, 81m 4s (PAL)

Rollin's second directorial outing and also his first color feature, ***La Vampire Nue*** is a key work in his filmography. In a bizarre twist of events, the Redemption Video release (which goes by the French title) is an English-dubbed version, while the VSoM edition (labelled in English) is the original French version with subtitles!

Pierre (Oliver Martin) lives with his father, the wealthy industrialist Ardamont (Maurice Lemaitre), in an apartment tended by twin, mute housekeepers (Catherine and Marie-Pierre Castel) wearing skimpy fetish costumes. He tells them of his frustration, unable to understand why his father has ordered him to stay away from his *piéd à terre* in the St. Louis district. While spying on the premises one night, he encounters a voluptuous, barely dressed young woman (Caroline Cartier) who is being pursued through the streets by tuxedoed men in animal masks. They capture the woman and Pierre manages to escape with his life. The next night, he returns to his father's secret abode, overcomes a guest and uses his pass to gain admittance to the premises. Inside, he witnesses the ceremonies of a secret sect, who are holding the woman hostage for the sake of scientific experimentation. Pierre resolves to rescue her. Ardamont tries to dissuade him by revealing that she is a freak of nature, an immortal impervious to physical harm, who feeds only on human blood—in other words, a true vampire. While Ardamont hopes to use the Vampire Girl to replicate her immortalizing blood in himself and other fat cats like him, Pierre forms a liberation army with the Girl's hippie-garbed vampire family, a pacific and enlightened race of nuclear mutations who ultimately defeat Ardamont because “evolution cannot be denied.”

Rollin reportedly scripted this film on the principle of mystery, with each scene progressing to the next on a pivot of the inexplicable. The first half works exceedingly well, frequently evoking the sense of exposure and danger felt in dreams, as Pierre is pursued through dank corridors and up fire escapes by tuxedoed cultists in deer and chicken masks. The second half, which is more narrative driven than fluid, is somewhat less successful; it also contains a couple of experimental,

static shots that are held for an inordinately long time, and a couple of its stunt shots are pathetic (an early gunshot suicide, the Castel Twins' embarrassing attempt to die falling down a flight of stairs—without injuring themselves). The greatest oddity of this production is that its most dreamlike passages were written consciously, while its historic parallels—it was filmed in the aftermath of the Paris student riots in 1968, thus explaining the outraged tone of generational conflict—were unintentional, hence subconscious!

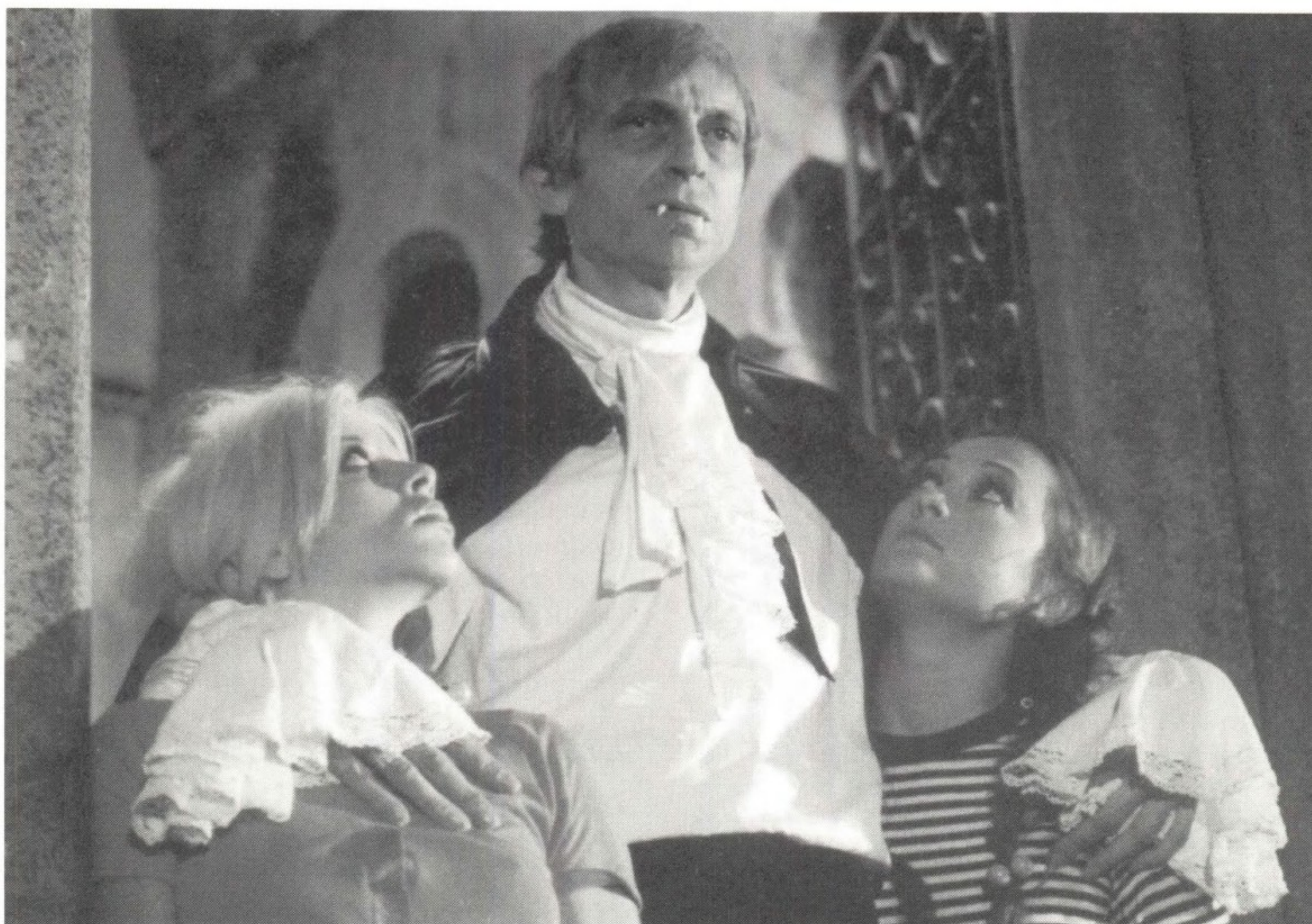
This film works best in its French version, which is sufficient reason alone to make VSoM's letterboxed (1.66:1) tape the definitive edition, despite a few technical shortcomings. The French print delivers authenticity, but the best surviving source materials are now heavily scratched at reel ends, with several instances of reparative splicing. The colors are bright and stable, however, and the sound remains in good condition. These materials have been somewhat further denigrated by VSoM's transfer, whose picture quality is somewhat coarse, and also sports some mild ghosting during the climactic beach sequence. The tape makes up for these minor shortcomings with the inclusion of a camcorder 2m 30s introduction by Rollin himself, who wears two of the animal masks seen in the film, and talks about the film's production and popularity in France. VSoM's cassette is packaged in a beautiful, full-color replica of the original French video release.

Redemption Video's tape looks sharper and cleaner than VSoM's, but the dubbed version—whose source materials are in better shape than those of the French edition—is less literate, and plays more like a parody than a work of passion; thus, it does not adequately reflect Rollin's intentions. Redemption's tape is also letterboxed at 1.66, and the English dubbing (which features a familiar voice or two) is as well-synchronized as possible.

REQUIEM FOR A VAMPIRE

1971, *Video Search of Miami*, HF/LB/+,
\$39.98, 82m 51s

For his next film, Jean Rollin improvised the script entirely, in the manner of a “campfire story,” beginning with the first image that popped into his head. The movie opens with two female clowns (Marie-Pierre Castel, Mirielle Dargent) exchanging gunfire with another car, after they have helped a man to escape from prison. The male escapee is killed, and the clowns douse his



Marie-Pierre Castel, Philippe Gaste and Mirielle Dargent in *REQUIEM FOR A VAMPIRE*.

body and their getaway vehicle in gasoline, setting both ablaze. They escape into the woods, where one is nearly raped and the other is nearly buried prematurely. Each helps the other to elude these dangers, but deeper in the woods they encounter a forest of bats and a castle whose dungeon harbors hooded skeletons, chained corpses, and a vampire woman (Dominique, who resembles Tom Cruise in **INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE!**). Horrified by the spectacle of chained women being ravished by subhuman henchmen, our heroines escape—only to discover that every road leads back to the castle. There, they meet the leader of the vampires (Philippe Gaste), who has sensed their virginity and needs this biological virtue to replenish his dying race.

Introducing some recurring elements in Rollin's *oeuvre*, while perpetuating others, ***Requiem pour un Vampire*** is intellectual, ethereal, tragic, intensely erotic and very low-budget—hence, a definitive work of French fantastic cinema, post-1970. The scene in which the forest becomes an Escher-like labyrinth of divergent returns to the vampires' chateau is a classic instance of imagination overcoming budgetary constraints,

recalling the supernatural time/space distortions in Mario Bava's **KILL, BABY, KILL** [***Operazione paura***, 1966]. The film is also formally adventurous, in that it contains almost no dialogue; the two heroines never speak, a decision which reinforces the fanciful spell cast by the film itself, while also sheltering the actresses' projections of innocence. This tender aura is violated, midway through, by a lengthy sequence of chained, naked women being roughly manhandled by the burly henchmen (which must have attracted Harry Novak, who gave the film an American release under the title **CAGED VIRGINS**); it's nasty and out of character with the surrounding footage, but it also has a ferociously tactile, undeniable sexual appeal, and the culminative image of a bat nesting in female pubic hair is quintessential Rollin. (In England, this sequence was censored by the BBFC, and thus, is not included in the Redemption Video release—making VSoM's release once again definitive.)

This is one of VSoM's best-looking Rollin tapes, with very good picture quality and a 1.66:1 screen ratio. The audio transfer suffers from a couple of audio dropouts—not too problematic

in a virtually silent film—but these must have been part of the master recording, as they do not result in any Hi-Fi flickering, or from mistracking. Rollin speaks briefly and enthusiastically about the film before it begins, and returns afterwards to show us the American **CAGED VIRGINS** pressbook—which he shrugs off with a laugh.

This movie is also available from VSoM in its English-dubbed version, which we're told is their best-selling Rollin title.

BACCHANALES SEXUELLES

1974, Video Search of Miami, HF/LB/+,
\$39.98, 101m 16s

This is the longer, most explicit version of Rollin's sophomore sex film **Tout le Monde il en a Deux** ("Everyone Has Two of Them"), directed under the pseudonym "Michel Gentil." Valerie (Joelle Coeur) is staying in the Paris apartment of her "weird" cousin Paul, while he's away in New York. (We know he's weird because of the posters for **La Vampire Nue** and **Les Frissons du Vampire** decorating his walls!) Afraid to be alone, she invites her friend Sophie to spend the night, which results in an evening of drunken lesbian sex. While Valerie is sleeping it off, Sophie is abducted by two masked intruders (Catherine and Marie-Pierre Castel), who mistake her for Valerie. They take her to the remote chateau of Madame Malvena, the Grand Priestess of a secret club known as "The Admirers of the Pure Flesh." Malvena has enslaved her members and servants with blackmail, and she seeks the return of photographic negatives stolen from her by Paul, before he left the country. While Sophie is stripped and tortured, Malvena sends one of her servants to Valerie to pose as her cousin's housekeeper and retrieve the stolen negatives.

This is a better-than-average sex film, and despite Rollin's personal reticence to claim it as his own (and the fact that he was not involved in the editing of this expanded version), it is not without interest to admirers of his work. The Druillet posters on display—and a cutaway shot to an actual mounted mask from **La Vampire Nue**—indicate that Rollin's own apartment served as the cousin's apartment set, and the subplot about Madame Malvena and the stolen film is an amusing twist on the pulp exotica of such inspirational mentors as Gaston Leroux and Sax Rohmer. Joelle Coeur, who previously excelled as the lusty pirate queen in Rollin's **Les**

Demoniaques (1973), is extremely easy on the eyes and probably could have carried the film without a plot. The various sexual trysts contained in the film—heterosexual, lesbian, *ménages à trois*, orgies—are scored with avant garde jazz ranging from atonal Ornette Coleman workouts to more lighthearted boinking music along the lines of "Ma-nah Ma-nah."

Bacchanales Sexuelles is attractive, colorful, letterboxed at 1.66:1, and despite its title, dubbed in English. The film also contradicts the long-standing rumor that this longer version of **Tout le Monde il en a Deux** contains hardcore inserts. It does contain some faked fellatio, as well as some other interaction teasing the limits of softcore, but there is no male genitalia on view, nor are there any penetration shots. "Michel Gentil" being unavailable for comment, the film is introduced by a 2m statement from Rollin's longtime production associate Lionel Wallmann.

LES RAISINS DE LA MORT

("The Grapes of Death")
1978, Video Search of Miami, HF/LB/+,
\$39.98, 84m 9s

If a horror film must be judged for more than its level of artistic achievement—namely, for its ability to frighten and to express something about its current national climate—this must be considered one of Rollin's most successful contributions to the genre. Two young women, Elizabeth (Marie-Georges Pascal) and Brigitte (Evelyne Thomas), share an otherwise vacant train as they embark on October vacations—Brigitte heading for Spain, Elizabeth for the village of Roubelais, where her boyfriend works in the local winery. A decomposing man boards the train and murders Brigitte, while Elizabeth escapes into even more claustrophobic, upsetting situations. In an isolated farmhouse, she encounters a rotting man who has murdered his wife (and who then proceeds to murder his daughter); in another village about a mile away from her destination, she meets a blind girl (Patricia Cartier) unaware that her townspeople are scattered in a state of dormant decay around her, and a demented woman (Brigitte Lahaie) who has taken up residence in the mayor's abandoned cottage, revelling in his dead wife's fancy wardrobe. As the dormant rotters awaken, Elizabeth is rescued from this death trap by two beer-drinking locals, with whose help she ultimately traces the fault to contaminated wine prepared at her boyfriend's winery in Roubelais, where a nuclear power plant was recently erected.



A crazed villager uncorks a bottle of red wine in LES RAISINS DE LA MORT.

Les Raisins de la Mort has been called “the first French gore film,” though Georges Franju’s **Les Yeux sans Visage** (1959) is more indelibly gruesome; it was, however, the first French horror film to make such extensive and central use of gory special makeup effects, which were achieved (as Rollin explains in his 2m 40s introduction) by technicians brought in from Italy. Filmed on the cheap during a period of unseasonably cold weather, many of the effects did not ooze as much as intended, but the adverse conditions seem to have inspired some believably chilled performances, and these, combined with Rollin’s uncanny knack for finding picturesque locations, help to convey the film’s atmosphere of imminent apocalypse. This film marked the first appearance of French sex star Brigitte Lahaie (spelled “Lehaye” in the credits) in a “regular” film, and she makes a striking mad-woman, posing amid the ruins with two large dogs à la Barbara Steele in **BLACK SUNDAY** (1960). Rollin was sufficiently impressed to cast her in the lead of his next film, **FASCINATION**. The director himself can be seen in a rare cameo, early in the film, as a worker at the winery.

VSoM’s transfer is very good, letterboxed at 1.66:1, though the source print contains some heavy scratching during one particular reel change. Some of the scenes have a dark reddish tint, which could either be another fault of the source materials or (as we prefer to think) a deliberate artistic choice of the cinematographer, as it gradually turns the filmstock to the color of wine! The subtitles contain some typos made in haste, but the sense of the storyline is well conveyed.

FASCINATION

1979, Video Search of Miami (USA), HF/LB/+, \$39.98 ppd., 76m 28s
Redemption Video #RETN 033 (UK), HF/LB, £14.99, 78m 10s (PAL)

In the early years of the 20th Century, wealthy French families are shown visiting a slaughterhouse to imbibe bull’s blood, a fashionable cure for anemia. A less fortunate “family,” a group of thieves, is shown absconding into the woods with a cache of stolen gold coins; the leader, Mark (Jean-Marie Lemaire), decides to claim them for himself, taking



Brigitte Lahaie and Franca Mai, looking *tres* sharp in *FASCINATION*.

a female compatriot as hostage to ensure his safe getaway. The girl escapes, and Mark is pursued to a moated château, where he meets Eva (Brigitte Lahaie) and Elizabeth (Franca Mai), a bisexual couple who persuade him to stay until the other members of their club arrive—a cult of rich women who have taken their anemia cure to the next level, of imbibing the blood of male victims.

An ideal introduction to Rollin's bizarre universe, **FASCINATION** gathers all of the director's recurring fetishes (criminals, lesbians, castles, antiques) into a straightforward horror fable, which also contains a serious, sociopolitical subtext for viewers who care to look beyond the flesh and blood. Like all good vampire films, **FASCINATION** ventures comment on the gulf between the upper and lower classes, asking us point-blank whether it is better to live as a vampire or as a thief, whether it is better to literally bleed the poor or steal from the rich. Lahaie and Mai give vivid performances (Lahaie's cannibalistic death scene is played with particular intensity), and even the least important characters are granted a word or gesture that makes them more substantial than the cardboard so often encountered in films of similar origin. The locations are evocative, the music is pretty, the period is reasonably well-sustained, and Rollin stocks the film with numerous images that weave pulp horror, comic book eros, and classic French

fairy tales into something distinctly... Rollin. The script seems to falter with Elizabeth's revelation that she has fallen in love with Mark, but when he rejects her, and she later reasons that it must have been his *blood* that she loved, Mai ends the film on a cruel and satisfying *frisson*.

VSoM's cassette opens with a 2m 41s videotaped introduction by the director, who speaks with candor and humor about the circumstances of the film's production, while holding a small poster. The film transfer is darker and generally more stable than the version released in England by Redemption Video, and the film itself runs somewhat shorter in length, though the contents of the two tapes are virtually identical. (The only exception is the final freeze-frame, which stops here at the lesbian kiss, with "*Fin*" superimposed; the Redemption tape runs past this, freezing instead on an awkward glance, to lesser effect.) VSoM's transfer is less crisp than one expects an authorized release to be, but the results are still quite watchable, restoring some of the film's handsome Rembrandt lighting, as well as a believable redness and viscosity to its makeup blood—both of which are diluted in Redemption's overbright transfer.

The English subtitles also differ between the two versions, with the Redemption version faring much better in terms of literacy and nuance. (VSoM's subtitles are at times unnecessarily and

disruptively raunchy.) Both tapes are letterboxed at 1.66:1, with the Redemption tape situating the entire matte at the bottom of the screen, allowing the subtitles to intrude on the frame as little as possible. By centering the frame on the screen, the VSoM transfer tends to print its subtitles on the frame. (The two translations also differ in their time frame, with Redemption claiming 1905 and VSoM mentioning 1916!)

THE LIVING DEAD GIRL

1981, *Video Search of Miami*, HF/LB/+,
\$39.98, 85m 47s

A hybrid between the poetical approach of his vampire films and the gory excesses of *Les Raisons de la Mort*, *La Morte Vivante* is an idiosyncratic Rollin film, but also a strangely compelling one. Two years after her death, the dead body of Catherine Valmont (Françoise Blanchard) is resurrected when toxic chemicals, being stored in her family crypt, are accidentally spilled. (Why her relatives don't also awaken, and why her body has not decayed over the years, is not explained.) A nude zombie, Catherine reproachfully pursues her lesbian lover Hélène (Marina Pierro), who has not kept her end of their suicide pact. Catherine's awakening has also left her with an insatiable thirst for warm blood, and after discovering a couple making love in her château, she kills and feeds on them. Hélène, contacted by telephone, arrives at the scene in disbelief and, despondent with guilt that her fear of death caused her to betray Catherine, undertakes the responsibility of luring unwitting nourishment to her castle. Their system is endangered when a photographer (Carina Barone) takes a snapshot of Catherine walking the countryside, and locals identify her as a woman two years dead.

Naked, blonde and bathed in blood, the apparition of Catherine Valmont attracts as it repels, and recalls the oft-reprinted image of Yutte Stensgaard in Hammer's *LUST FOR A VAMPIRE* (which exists in stills, though not in the film itself). As played by Blanchard, who succeeds in conveying complex emotions through the inexpressive deadness of her character's façade, Catherine is a pathetic and tragic heroine, a figurehead of perverted nostalgia. Marina Pierro, an unusual beauty best remembered as the fiancée in Walerian Borowczyk's *BLOODLUST: THE STRANGE CASE OF DR. JEKYLL & MISS OSBOURNE* [*Dr. Jekyll et les Femmes*, 1981], gives an equally interesting performance as her guilt-ridden lover, forced to live the nightmare of having the details of her self-reproach gruesomely externalized. While the

level of performance is higher than usual in a Rollin film, the direction is somewhat flatter, and the *deus ex machina* of the toxic spill is not only awkward but unnecessary, de-emphasizing some of the subtler, more important implications of the narrative. French film critic Alain Petit (who also appeared in a couple of Jess Franco films) appears in a brief cameo.

VSoM's tape begins with a 3m intro by Rollin, in which he jovially discusses the film's production. The feature is letterboxed at 1.85:1 and is the only current source for a complete, uncut presentation of this film. (Redemption Video's British release of **THE LIVING DEAD GIRL** was forced to delete a certain amount of graphic footage before receiving BBFC certification.) The picture quality is average. The subtitling is again erratic, with Hélène becoming "Elaine," but adequate.

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Prior to VSoM's exclusive contract with Rollin, Something Weird Video briefly released three Rollin films found in the capacious vaults of softcore sex king Harry Novak, all dubbed into English: **THE NUDE VAMPIRE**, **THRILL OF THE VAMPIRE** [*Le Frisson des Vampires*, 1970], and **CAGED VIRGINS** [*Requiem pour un Vampire*, 1971]. Of these films, only **CAGED VIRGINS** was given a theatrical release through Boxoffice International, Novak's distribution company. Shortly after VSoM acquired the exclusive right to release Rollin's films in North America, Something Weird withdrew these titles from their catalog.

None of Something Weird's Rollin releases could be considered definitive, but two of them provided certain points of interest. Unlike VSoM's version, **THE NUDE VAMPIRE** was dubbed in English like the Redemption release; it was also pale, scratchy, ill-synchronized, almost full-screen (1.45:1), incomplete at 80m 58s, and worst of all, featured the SWV logo in the lower right corner throughout the entire feature. The liner notes also followed those of the Redemption release word-for-word.

Of greater interest was **THRILL OF THE VAMPIRE**, which contained quite a bit of additional erotic footage—whippings, people screwing on cemetery monuments—not found in Redemption's or VSoM's releases. Some of this footage was apparently shot by Rollin himself, while some of it was provided by a production associate. SWV's transfer was also oversaturated with color, making it difficult to discern much detail in the image, but it was a unique version that deserves to resurface someday. 🐾

JEAN ROLLIN HAS RISEN FROM THE GRAVE!

Interview by
Peter Blumenstock

THERE WAS A TIME, not so long ago, when Jean Rollin—the French master of erotic horror cinema—was prepared to pound a stake through his art and declare his directorial career dead. Now, appropriately for someone who has spent so much time filming beautiful people climbing in and out of coffins, it is a grand and well-deserved time of resurrection for Rollin.

After many years of having his films discussed more often than actually seen, a half-dozen Rollin films have appeared on the Redemption Video label in the UK. More recently, Video Search of Miami signed with Rollin to oversee the exclusive, authorized release of his films on video in the United States. This long overdue awakening of interest in Rollin's work put the 57 year-old director (born November 3, 1938 in Neuilly-sur-Seine) in the position of being able to direct his first horror film in twelve years.

Rollin's comeback, **Les Deux Orphelines Vampires** ("The Two Vampire Orphans"), based on his own novel, was filmed last July on location in Paris and New York. Filmed on a tight budget of \$3,000,000 Francs (about \$700,000)—Rollin's most indulgent budget ever—the production was beset by a comedy of errors. Star Tina Aumont, cast as "The Ghoul," reportedly arrived on the set expecting to play a Gypsy Woman, wearing an appropriate costume and having memorized appropriate lines, though no such character or dialogue appeared in Rollin's script! Later, when the owner of a chain of French cinemas saw the film's final cut and expressed interest in financing a small theatrical release in Paris, Rollin and the exhibitor went out to a celebratory dinner. As they dined, the first two reels of the workprint were stolen from Rollin's

car (along with his video camera)—killing the time-sensitive distribution deal, and necessitating that the film's first 20m be re-edited from scratch! Despite these drawbacks, the result is perhaps Rollin's most beautiful achievement—nostalgic, erotic, and above all, charming in its imaginative flourish. It screened at MIFED this past autumn, and is presently seeking international distribution.

The following interview was conducted by Peter Blumenstock at Rollin's cozy, book-cluttered apartment in Paris, in May 1995. —TL

How did you become interested in cinema?

I saw my very first film when I was about five years old, out in the country, during the second World War. It made a profound impression on me. It was **Capitaine Fracasse** (1942) by Abel Gance. I particularly remember the storm sequence. I have never seen anything more fascinating and magical; it simply changed my life forever. My mother told me that, after the screening, I said I wanted to do exactly that when I grew up, so making films is a desire I've carried around with me for quite some time now.

Where your parents happy about your choice of vocation? The War years were a difficult time, when films were not commonly regarded as respectable art form.

Well, you know how it is when children want to step into a certain profession. Nobody believed this was more than a temporary idea. Also, my father was an actor working in the theater, so that was also a heavy influence and helped. My parents were

Jean Rollin today. ►





A Remembrance of Films Past: LES DÉMONIAQUES.

separated. I never lived with my father, but once in awhile, I went to the theater where he worked and saw him performing some of the classics on stage. Thus, my wish to step into an artistic profession didn't appear to them as a curse.

When I was 15 years old, my mother gave me a typewriter, because she thought it might be useful if I knew how to use one. That was an important moment; that's when everything started. I found a means of expressing myself. I began to write little screenplays and stories, heavily influenced by the films I saw. I adored Cecil B. DeMille's work, and when I was about 13 or 14, I became really obsessed with American serials. When I was a schoolboy, television didn't yet exist, so after school, I regularly went to the movies with my friends. The cinema and comic books were our whole lives! We were playing them, talking about them, *living* them.

I remember **JUNGLE JIM** (1948) with Johnny Weissmuller, also **THE SHADOW** (1940) and **THE MYSTERIOUS DR. SATAN** (1940). These were

serials, always to be continued next week, so once an episode was over, nothing mattered but getting through the next week as quickly as possible! The serials were not just a special piece of culture; they also had a real spirit to them, which changed our lives and attitudes. I certainly know, that these events are the source for most of the ideas that recur throughout my films. The spirit, structure and contents of the serial is the key to my type of cinema. I work from childhood memories, and even if I sometimes cannot name a film in particular, I know that all my ideas originated from that time.

Can you trace some specific examples?

The beach, for instance. That's a motif often seen in my films. I don't know exactly where I saw it first, but I am sure it was in one of these serials. The whole beginning of **LES DÉMONIAQUES** (1973), for example, is a strange remembrance of the pirate and swashbuckler films I saw back then.

It's strange: most people directing or writing in the genre also work from childhood memories, but they usually don't have nice stories to tell. They seem to have experienced awful things as a child, which is the reason why they chose the genre as their medium.

My childhood was wonderful, and my reflections of it are very romantic, sweet and utterly transfigured. Like recalling one's first love, 20 years later.

What were your first actual steps toward working professionally in the cinema?

When I was about 16 years old, I found a job at Le Films des Saturne. I was just there to help, to write invoices and so forth, because I wanted to earn some money and I certainly wanted to do something connected with cinema. They specialized in creating opening and closing titles and little cartoons, but they also shot real films, industrial shorts and documentaries now and then. One day, they were assigned to make a short documentary about Snecma, a big factory in France which builds motors for airplanes. I was part of the crew, so we went to the factory and started shooting. It was my first time on a real movie set with a camera and objects to be filmed. Of course, it had no actors, no fictional story to tell, but it was enough to get me completely excited. It was a new world for me. I remember working very hard, although it didn't seem to be work for me. I did everything: I arranged the travelling shots, laid the tracks, checked the electricity, helped the cameraman.

I've also heard that you worked as an editor in the French army?

That's correct. When I did my military service, I worked in the cinema department together with Claude Lelouch, who had to join the army at the same time as I did. We worked on army commercials there. He directed and I did the montage. We did two films. One was a documentary about the mechanographic service called ***Mechanographie***; the other was a real film running one hour, with actors and a story, called ***La Guerre de Silence*** ("The War of Silence").

It's hard to believe that you started as an editor. When I look at your films today, I never see montage being asserted as a stylistic device.

For me, montage is just a means to combine scenes, nothing more. I think the creation of a film should happen during the shooting. Since I began in this business as an editor, I know exactly where I want to have a cut, so I usually edit my films in camera. Later on, the editing process is just a formality for me. The scenes are shot in a certain way and it is impossible to arrange them differently. I never use a lot of cameras and shoot scenes from a variety of different angles to choose from afterwards. I hate that. For me, the creation of cinema should occur during the writing and shooting stage. Afterwards, we can re-arrange a bit here and there, sure, but that's about it. Also, from a stylistic point of view, the montage not particularly important to me. I very much prefer long scenes and plateaus. Editing is something completely abstract; it adds another dimension to the story which I don't really care about. I have chosen different ways, so for me, the editing is basically nothing but a reflection of the shooting process.

In 1958, you directed your first short film, *Les Amours Jaunes* ("The Yellow Lovers"). How did that happen?

After my army service, I wanted to shoot something on my own. Shortly before I had to join the army, I worked as an editor for a film company that produced newsreels. I was in the editing department, but of course, there was also an actual camera staff of six or seven operators, ready to go whenever something happened. I made friends with one of them, and one day, he gave me one of his old cameras, a 35mm Maurigraphe (terribly heavy and complicated), so I could work with it over the weekend. Well, we made a film.

We shot it on the beach near Dieppe, charging the cameras on the toilets there [LAUGHS]! It was

inspired by the French writer Tristan Corbière. I am very fond of him. He is a sort of outsider. And maybe somebody really modern, ahead of his time, yet also very romantic and bound to the past. Someone betwixt two worlds. I like his personality and attitude towards life very much.

I did my next short film in 1961. It was called ***Ciel de Cuivre*** ("Sky of Copper"). It was quite surreal, telling a sentimental story; unfortunately, it wasn't very good. I never finished it because I ran out of money, and also because I realized it wasn't really working out. The footage is now lost. I have no idea where it might be.

One year later, you worked for the first (and also last) time as an assistant director. The film was Jean-Marc Thibault's *Un Cheval pour Deux* ("A Horse for Two," 1962).

That was not a particularly pleasant experience. I don't think I am a very good assistant [LAUGHS]; I think it was enough to take this job only once. I came back from the army, I was just married, and I needed work to make a living. Some friends of mine were running a theatre at Montmatre, and they were also involved in producing films once in awhile. One day, they asked if I was interested in assisting Thibault and I agreed. I learned a lot of things on the set. Nevertheless, it was an experience which may have influenced my decision to approach cinema in a different way. I am basically a self-taught filmmaker. Sure, I worked as an editor, but everything else I know about making films comes from doing it. Improvising, trying things, making mistakes and trying to make it better next time. It is an instinctive process for me. I have never seen the inside of a film school in my entire life. I think I know how a traditional, classical film should be shot, what technique is required, but when I shot my first films, I tried to forget about that as much as possible. I wanted to work spontaneously, without any regulations in my head. I don't believe there is only one form of cinema, just because it has become the standard approach, and because most films are shot that way. That's an unnecessary limitation.

L'Itineraire Marin (1960) was supposed to become your first feature film. You also had to abandon that project.

We shot one hour of usable film. Then we ran into some problems and needed professional help to shoot the remaining thirty minutes. I was looking for money and the possibility of a small distribution. I saw every professional working in the film business in Paris, but nobody cared. Marguerite

Duras worked with me on that film. She was completely unknown at that time. Nowadays, that's certainly different [LAUGHS]! Then there was also Gaston Modot, who appeared in *L'Age d'Or*, and René-Jacques Chauffard. The negative is in the lab, so maybe, one day, I will dig it out and do something with it. Perhaps a small video release. Michel Lagrange, one of the actors, has since become a well known writer. He died a few months ago and some people want to resurrect my film because of him.

The Nouvelle Vague became extremely popular at that time. Am I right to suspect that you were never really a follower of that movement? What was your attitude towards these directors and their cinema?

I met most of them at Henri Langlois' Cinématèque Française; we talked, and I saw their films, but you're right. It was not exactly my cup of tea. It was a movement similar to German New Wave filmmaking, some sort of rebellion against the old directors—not only their approach and vision, but also their technical style. I was always most attracted to traditional, old French cinema, but there is no doubt that the *Nouvelle Vague* played an important economic role. They proved it was possible for young people without experience to make successful, acclaimed films on a small budget. They gave me and others the courage to attempt the same feat.

In the early '60s, you also became interested in politics. You did a short documentary about Generalissimo Francisco Franco called *Vivre en Espagne* ("Life in Spain," 1964). How come you chose a Spaniard as your target?

I was part of the "left wing" at that time, and there was an organization here in France to help the Spanish resistance against Franco. I knew them, and they asked me to make a short documentary, shot in Spain. I was interested, so we packed our camera equipment and went there. The resulting film, about thirty minutes, wasn't very good, but we risked a great deal to get it made. There was another French crew shooting risky stuff in Madrid at that time; Frédéric Rossif was making *Mourir à Madrid* ("Death in Madrid," 1964). I don't know which company blew their cover first, but we suddenly found ourselves hunted by the police and we managed to cross the border back into France just in time. It was close, *very* close [LAUGHS]!

It is curious, because you never really approached an openly political subject afterwards in your fantastic films, which are normally predestined to contain certain political ideas.

Well, the fantastic cinema is always a good vehicle for discussing certain political ideas in the form of symbols and metaphors, but you're right, I have never really worked with political themes afterwards. Although now that you mention it, I remember that, when *La Nuit des Traquées* ("Night of the Hunted," 1980) opened here in Paris, a lot of people came to me and said I had made a film about the German prison problem. I am talking about Stammheim and the RAF. Looking back, I think it might be true. I didn't do it consciously, but it was the same period, so it is absolutely possible. You know, those stories about solitary confinement, no light, nobody to talk to, no noises, everything very cold and sterile, and this is exactly what people saw in my film. Perhaps I was influenced to bring that to the screen.

In general, the fantastic cinema is always political, because it is always in the opposition. It is subversive and it is popular, which means it is dangerous. I made films with sex and violence at a time when censorship was very strong, so that was certainly a political statement as well, although again, not a conscious one. I just happen to have an imagination which doesn't correspond with those of certain conservative people [LAUGHS]!

Around the time of your Franco documentary, you also started publishing fiction. In which literary style would you classify your writing?

I don't know. I cannot really mention any specific authors which have influenced my style particularly. Sure, I adore Gaston Leroux and Corbière, but they did not affect my writing on a stylistic level. I began writing books the way I was writing scripts. I am a very visual person, thus also a very visual writer. In films, I have something to show; in books, I want to convey the same thing, a world seen through my eyes, so I have to express the same vision with words. My books often appear like screenplays and they share the same rhythm and structure as my films.

So do you think of yourself as a director who writes, or as a writer who directs films?

It depends. I am not in the same state of mind when I write and when I make a film. I am, of course, much freer when I write, because I don't have to



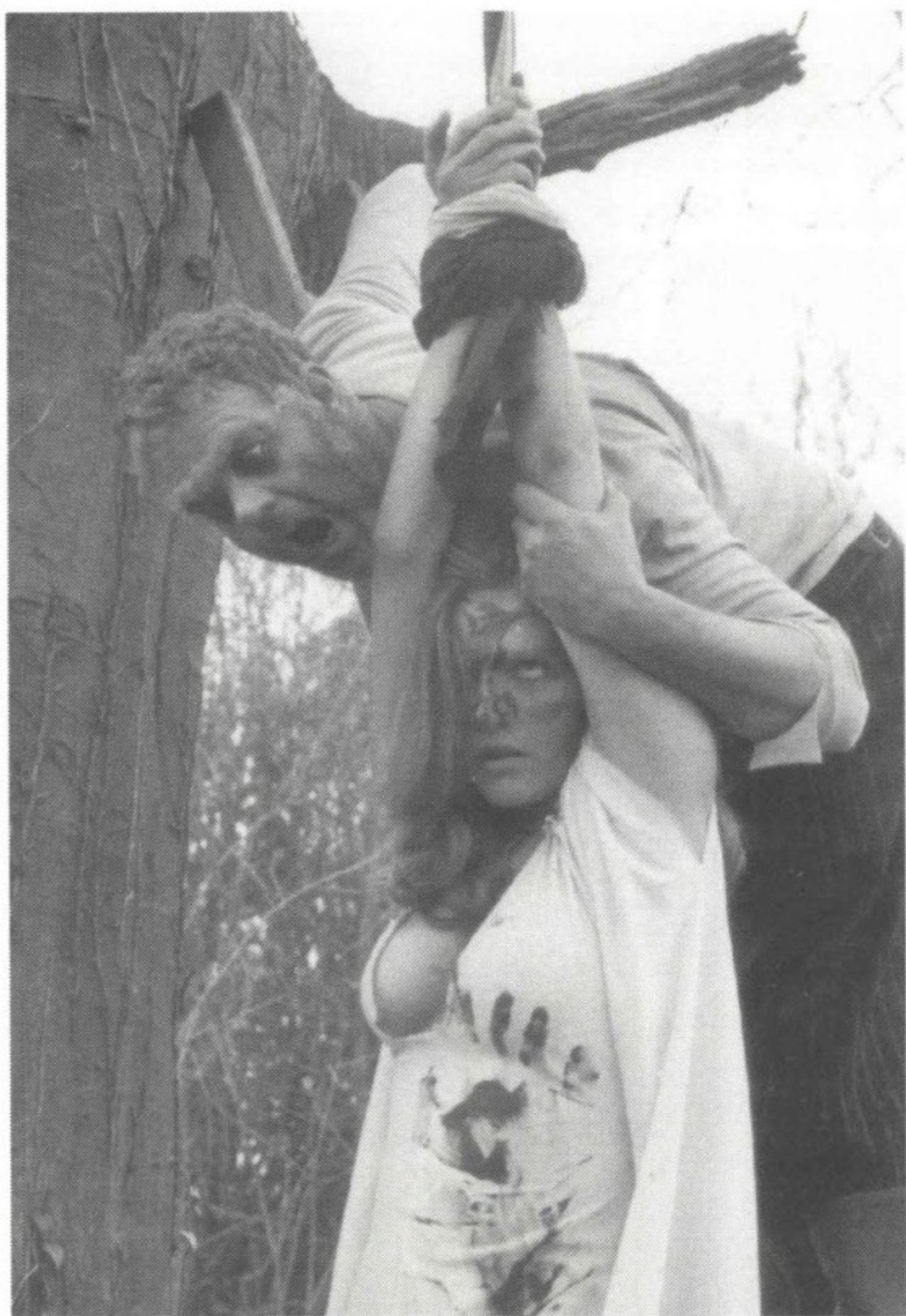
Rollin (right) on location with the crew of his first horror film, LE VIOL DU VAMPIRE (1968).

bother about anything. I just need paper and a typewriter. The creation is not the same, at least not when it comes to my kind of cinema. With a film, you have to consider that there are actors, who often don't want the same things you want; there are technicians, money problems, a producer, and you have to fight with all these elements. On a book, I only have to fight with my imagination. The visual world is much more open to surrealism and metaphysics. Cinema is a wonderful medium to express naïveté and vagueness. And it is an adventure, where you just delve deeply into it and get carried away by the events and problems. The resulting film is a combination of yourself, your luck, your misfortune, your problems and your subconscious.

What was important for me, however, was to stick to the theatrical concept of improvisation in my books as well. It is the same journey with screenplays, books, or on the set. I write something and suddenly, off the cuff, I can improvise ten or twenty pages with things that just flood my mind.

I don't know to which extent my work as a filmmaker has influenced my writings and vice versa. That's something I might be able to tell you

after I make my next film, ***Les Deux Orphelines Vampires*** ("The Two Vampire Orphans"), because it will be based on one of my novels. It will also be interesting for me, because I've been extremely busy with my writing in recent years, and haven't directed a feature for quite some time. I think a director who is also a writer pays attention to different details. That can be dangerous, but it can also make for a very strange film—in the positive sense. It is true that writing directors make films which are much more personal and metaphysical, because cinema means that the writer must abandon one dimension. In books, you can talk to the reader, you can write down people's thoughts. Film is more vague; you know what the characters feel, and you try to convey these emotions visually. Curiously, though I like to re-read my old books now and again, I don't like looking back at my old films. I don't know why, really; maybe because the fantasy in them has become fixed, which might have suited my imagination then but not now, so I am disappointed. Cinema means to decide, to decide which actor to use, which set, which camera angle, and to eliminate all other possibilities in your head.



LE VIOL DU VAMPIRE

France is renowned for its artistic and literary groups—the Surrealists, the Nouvelle Vague, the Nouveau Roman, and so forth. I get the impression that you formed something like that with people like Ado Kyrrou and Eric Losfeld.

Many of these people came to the library of Eric Losfeld. I was one of them. I was very young and came to listen to what all those people were saying during the meetings. I was sitting in one dark corner, quiet, and listening. I remember Ado Kyrrou there, and Losfeld and Jacques Sternberg. One day, Losfeld looked at me and ordered me to come over to get into a conversation with them. That was the beginning. I was so proud to be there, to be able to speak with all these people, who were my heroes. Ado Kyrrou was a very respected and important critic at that time. I read everything he wrote. We became close friends, and I came every Saturday morning to the library to meet with them. For me, they represented the spirit of everything. They were incredibly cultured, and they shared the same attitude towards life as I did. We were of the same kind. I agreed with everything they said, everything they wrote rang true for me. When I was among them, I felt at home and understood.

Eric Losfeld intended to publish my first novel, *LES PAYS LOINS* ("The Distant Lands"), which never happened because he died. I had two things going with Losfeld. First, he wanted to publish this novel of mine, then, there was this strange French writer named George Maxwell, who wrote a series of 22 very bizarre books, and Losfeld had the rights, so we wanted to reprint them with an introduction by myself. I was also supposed to do the cover photographs.

In 1965, you made a short film called *Les Pays Loins*. Did you do it because the book was never published?

No, no. I just used the title. The story got nothing to do with my novel, which was basically written in the form of an essay.

In 1967, you also got involved in comics. I am talking about *SAGA OF XAM*.

Eric Losfeld had published the first adult comic in France, *BARBARELLA* by Jean-Claude Forest. It was extremely successful, so he wanted to publish more adult comics. One of my friends was Nicolas Deville, and he was responsible for the decoration of some of my short films. We were very close, and I knew that he was a fabulous painter. I encouraged him to propose something to Losfeld, so I arranged a meeting and it worked out. We did *SAGA OF XAM* together. It was a little science fiction story about a girl from outer space coming down to earth to experience a lot of strange adventures. I also met Philippe Druillet around the same time. He would later play in *Le Viol du Vampire* ("Rape of the Vampire," 1967) and created the posters for some of my films.

Around this time, you wrote a lengthy essay about Gaston Leroux which appeared in the final two issues of the famous magazine *MIDI-MINUIT FANTASTIQUE*.

I was always an admirer of Leroux. I read his works when I was very young and he certainly influenced me a great deal in my decision to make genre films. I think that, at that time, his approach to literature was very close to my approach to making films. I wrote that essay on Leroux as some sort of exercise. I never expected it to be published. Losfeld looked at it and liked it, so he published the thing. At the end of that essay, there is an excerpt from a screenplay, signed "Michel Gentil," which would later become the pseudonym I used for my hardcore films. That was just a joke. I only wrote those few pages especially for the essay.

After that, you finally made your first feature film: *Le Viol du Vampire*. Why did you abandon your writing career at this point? Obviously, you had good connections with publishers and other writers?

It was always my intention to make films. That was my first love. I was working in that newsreel company, and during holidays, I took some money which I had saved and began filming. First, I made the aforementioned *Les Pays Loins*, and right after that, I began *Le Viol du Vampire*, which was also a short film in the beginning. It was only half an hour long.

This is a very weird story. Originally, that film was supposed to be the extension of an American horror film, a PRC film called **DEAD MEN WALK** (1943), starring George Zucco and Dwight Frye. Jean Lavie, a young distributor and a good friend of mine, told me he had bought this very film and it was supposed to be shown in the Scarlett and Midi-Minuit theaters in Paris, two cinemas specializing in this type of cinema, but they couldn't show it, because it was too short, scarcely an hour long. He proposed to me that I shoot about thirty minutes of film, so they could add it and show the film without problems. I spoke with Sam Selsky and told him that, if he would finance these thirty minutes, we'd have a contract and distributor immediately and that it would be shown in a couple of popular cinemas in Paris. He agreed and we did it.

How did you meet Sam Selsky, the producer of most of your subsequent films?

Selsky is a European American, so to speak; he's lived in France for a long time. He has been to every corner in the world, but eventually ended up in Paris, working as an administrator for UNESCO. He loved the cinema, so one day, he bought a little movie theatre and also got into production. I doubt that he otherwise would have touched the project. I don't know why he chose to work with me. Just a good feeling maybe. He trusted me, and he was the first one to do so. At that time, I was trying to raise money for films, but nobody gave me a chance because I had no real experience. Selsky believed in me. Also, it was just half an hour of film, so it was not too much of a financial risk, and I managed to convince him. And then he said, like a perfect businessman, that if we could make half an hour of film for practically nothing, we could also make a feature-length film for practically nothing—knowing that it was preferable to have a complete feature in hand rather than a short. There was also the consideration that my friend, the distributor, at that particular moment,

was broke and that our 30 minute film might never see the light of day because of that. Thus, we had to add a second part to *Le Viol du Vampire*, entitled *La Reine des Vampires* ("Queen of the Vampires"). Selsky, who is quite a materialistic person, said that the film was so strange, so absurd, it was possible that audiences would like it. He understood absolutely nothing of the story, but it was so bizarre he believed it could be successful. And he was right, it made quite some money.

Of course, it was also a terrible scandal. After the film had opened in four Paris cinemas to very extreme audience reactions, I said I would never make another film. I absolutely didn't expect this reaction; it hit me like a bolt from the blue! People were shouting, throwing trash at the screen. The press went crazy and called me a madman, they called the film the work of a group of crazy students! I was really afraid they are going to lynch me. Some members of the cast and crew freaked out, as well. They hated it, and shouted at me as if I had committed a crime. And I didn't realize at all what I had done after shooting. Now, when I see the film again, I realize how crazy it was to do something like that at this moment in time, with all the student riots in the streets of Paris. It is very much

LE VIOL DU VAMPIRE





Maurice Lemaitre with The Castel Twins in *LE VAMPIRE NUE*.

a film of its time, although I never wanted it to be like that and I didn't realize it back then. I know now that my environment influences me a great deal, even if I'm not aware of it, which is also the reason why I told you that story of Stammhaim. I really think there *could* be a connection, just as there is a connection between ***Le Viol...*** and its time of creation.

Sam Selsky arranged a special screening for the Moulin brothers, the owners of the Midi-Minuit, the Scarlett and some other cinemas in the same mold. He knew that it was impossible to understand what the hell was going on in the story, so during the screening, he was constantly talking to them, disturbing their concentration. So, whenever they said they couldn't understand why this-or-that happened, Selsky replied that they had missed a very important plot twist because of his talking and that they shouldn't worry because it made perfect sense! [LAUGHS]

Would you say that *Le Viol du Vampire* was the most improvisational of your films?

Yes, that one, but also ***Les Trottoirs des Bangkok*** ("Streetwalkers of Bangkok," 1984). Some critics wrote that I made two films in my career that are virtually identical: ***Le Viol...*** and ***Les Trottoirs...***, and they might be right. When

we did ***Le Viol...***, I was quite serious about it, but when I did ***Les Trottoirs...***, I took a tongue-in-cheek approach. But both films stem from the same love for a certain type of cinema and both are definitely honest films. Even the soundtrack of ***Le Viol...*** was improvised! François Tusques was one of the very first French musicians to play free jazz and I adore jazz, so it was clear I wanted that type of music for the film. You can see François together with his group in the theatre sequence. We shot it in the Grand Guignol theater during their final active period. I loved their work and I always wanted to do something connected with them.

Was the vampire motif forced on you by the scenario of DEAD MEN WALK?

No, that was a coincidence. Everybody knew I loved that type of film and that I always wanted to shoot something like that.

You are obviously fascinated by vampires. What makes them so special for you? You never really cared about Frankenstein, werewolves or mummies.

That's difficult to answer. I don't really know. Maybe, because the vampire can be attractive, and certainly also because it gave me the possibility to

show some nice girls not wearing very much [LAUGHS]! An erotic werewolf or an erotic mummy... I don't think so. Maybe it's also got something to do with my nature and the nature of my films. A vampire is like an animal, a predator—wild, emotional, naive, primitive, sensual, not too concerned with logic, driven by emotions, but also very aesthetic and beautiful, and these are terms also often used when my films are being described. At least when they are being described by my admirers [LAUGHS]!

Since *Le Viol du Vampire*, you have been stereotyped as a director of erotic vampire films. Are you happy with that?

Honestly, I don't care. Some people say I'm a genius, others consider me the greatest moron who ever stepped behind a camera. I have heard so many things said about me and my films, but these are just opinions. I am perfectly happy with what I do, because it has always been my choice.

La Vampire Nue ("The Nude Vampire," 1969) was your first color film. The animal masks in it are very reminiscent of Franju's *Judex*.

Of course, *Judex* inspired me a lot, and also the concept of surrealism in general. It's funny, because for my second film, I really wanted to do something a little more temperate than *Le Viol du Vampire*. I wanted to make a well done, traditional mystery film. Looking back on it now, why, it's not a classical film at all! It is exactly the same kind of film as *Le Viol...*! [LAUGHS] Not so delirious maybe, but it certainly has the same spirit. Well, it's a Rollin film. You mentioned the colors. I often hear that my use of color bears a certain signature. I never thought of that while I was making these films. I am responsible for the way my films are lighted, but I also had big problems with my director of photography, Jean-Jacques Renon, because he had a vision of his own which he wanted to realize. That became even more evident on *Le Frisson des Vampires* ("Thrill of the Vampires," 1970), where the colors are even more important and flamboyant.

La Vampire Nue was your first collaboration with the twins Catherine and Marie-Pierre "Pony" Castel, who became regulars in your subsequent works.

Oh yes! They are the only twins to be found in French cinema, and they've done vampire films and porn together [LAUGHS]! They were originally hairdressers. One of my assistants came to me

one day and told me that he'd found a pair of twins who might interest me, so I met with them. They wanted to be actresses, a dream they had for quite some time. They had a certain naïve quality that I felt would be ideal for my type of cinema. It was very difficult to get the two of them at the same time. Originally, I wanted to have them both in *Le Frisson...*, but one of them [Marie-Pierre] was pregnant, so we could use only one and had to find that beautiful Asian substitute for the other. After *Requiem pour un Vampire* ("Requiem for a Vampire," 1971), the other one [Catherine] got pregnant, so once again there was a problem! I don't know whatever became of them. One of them was living not far from here, but I haven't seen her for quite some time now.

You are basically the only director in France making genre films. Whenever French fantasy cinema is mentioned, your name is always dropped as well. Do you think your films can be seen as proper examples of French fantastic culture?

I don't think it can be said that I am a representative of French fantastic culture *per se*. My films are melting pots of American pulp films and a certain amount of German Expressionism. I was definitely influenced by the Expressionist films of Robert Wiene. Not necessarily *THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI*, but I remember *THE HANDS OF ORLAC*. All that, and of course the films of the

Animal masks in LE VAMPIRE NUE.



great period of British filmmaking and many other things I cannot name because I don't consciously realize how much they influenced me. Also, there is certainly a heavy dose of my own personality involved. I am French, so there are certainly a lot of French things to be found in them. It is not particularly French culture, it is particularly *Rollin* [LAUGHS]!

It's very difficult to answer that question, you know, because there isn't really a French tradition of fantastic cinema. I guess what you mean is that certain cultural bond that exists within a country's cinema, such as the reflection of the Weimar Republic and the early shades of Fascism in German Expressionist cinema, or Catholicism in the Italian cinema, right?

Exactly.

Well, as far as France is concerned, I would have to name literature as the basis of our fantastic culture. The French cinema, as a rule, is *not* fantastic. There are no roots. Also, I don't think French people in general like the fantastic, at least not what I consider to be fantastic. Sure, we have a couple of magazines dedicated to horror films, but they survive because they print gory stills and that's what attracts people. These are two different pairs of shoes for me.

It was obvious from your early films that you weren't at all concerned with popular trends and did pretty much your own thing. That's also the case when you made more "commercial" horror films such as Les Raisins de la Mort ("The Grapes of Death," 1978) or La Morte Vivante ("The Living Dead Girl," 1982). Did you always intend to remain a maverick, an outsider to the French film industry, or did you have hopes of breaking into more commercial areas of the film business?

I don't think it could have worked, and I realized that. I knew I had to remain in my parallel world, because anything else would have resulted in a disaster. The films I make are impossible with a normal production. They have to be marginal. I certainly was tempted to try to make a big film with big stories and big stars, but I'm not sure I could make a good film like that. You know, Buñuel was a bit like that. When he had to shoot a little film with no money and no professional actors, somewhere in the desert, like **NAZARIN**, he managed to create a masterpiece. When he had a reasonable budget, the result was not exactly the same. Maybe we share the same kind of imagination. My imagination is too strong to completely abandon

what is important to me. Also, I don't think I am a universal director. I don't think I could direct comedies, for example. I simply cannot escape from myself. I have to fight with the money, that's better for me, that's the type of cinema I grew up with. The difficulties I encounter during production oblige me to invent, to become really creative. I think it's in these moments that my cinematic universe becomes a reality. Anything else would be dishonest and a waste of time and energy.

Le Frisson des Vampires was heavily influenced by the trappings of the Hippie movement.

To a certain extent, yes. I thought it would be nice to work that in. I liked the music of the group Acanthus very much. Jean-Phillipe Delamarre, the brother of my assistant Jean-Noëlle, had a little music publishing company. One day, he told me that there were these young schoolboys who had formed a group and liked the fantastic cinema, and that they wanted to work with me. That's how we got together. They separated right after and never did anything else again. They disappeared.

What about the film's leading actress, Sandra Julien? She was incredibly beautiful...

... and not too clever, I must tell you [LAUGHS]! She was a model and, you're right, very beautiful. She also appeared in a couple of other French films at that time. We were looking for a girl to play the leading part, which was not exactly easy. It was a vampire film with erotic scenes, and that didn't sound particularly enticing to a lot of actresses. I worked with Sandra's husband, Pierre Julien, who was a technician on **Le Frisson...** and **Jeunes Filles Impudiques** ("Young Girls Without Shame," 1973), a sex film I did few years later. He suggested Sandra, we made a screen test and she was perfect.

The last day of shooting turned into a big mess. We were a little drunk, I have to admit, and we were shooting that scene where the vampire is killed at the beginning of the film. I had the brilliant idea that the castle would start bleeding after the death of the vampire. We made a mixture of red wine, paint and other ingredients and threw it against the walls. The problem was, it stayed there and we couldn't get it off again! I guess it's still there [LAUGHS]! The owner of the castle was not exactly happy, as you can imagine. We even called the fire department and they tried their best with a powerful water jet, but it was useless...



Sandra Julien with undead friends in LES FRISONS DES VAMPIRES.

What about the additional scenes which can be found in an American version of the film?

When I first heard of them, I was sure somebody else had shot and inserted them afterwards. I saw that version recently and it is strange, but these scenes are familiar to me. I think the producer shot some additional footage for foreign territories—South America in particular, I think. I only directed a little sequence inside the cemetery at Clichy, the love scene on the graves. Just a very small scene. I remember I did that, but all the other scenes were done by somebody else. I was only there as a spectator. They would have never allowed us to shoot such an explicit sex scene inside a cemetery, so we lied to the caretakers about what we were going to do in there. Because it was late at night, there was only one cemetery guard around, and Natalie Perrey went to him with a couple of liquor bottles and kept him “entertained” and distracted.

Something very funny happened during the shooting of that scene. The motorway passes that cemetery up on a hill and we checked to see if motorists might see what was going on down there. There was some sort of fence, so we figured they

couldn't see, so we started filming. What we didn't take into account was the elevation of trucks. The truck drivers could see everything! During the shooting, we looked up by accident and there was this incredible traffic jam, with countless trucks backed up on the motorway to enjoy the show!

I wonder why these extra scenes were not used for other world markets. It's obviously more commercial—more sex, more violence.

Yes, but the censorship in France was very strict at that time. And honestly, the film didn't need them. What we had was enough and I didn't want that stuff to be put in. I don't like it. I don't know what became of this material. Maybe it is in the lab, but I doubt it. I guess it is destroyed. Not much of a loss if you ask me. Monique Natan, the producer of the film, wanted to produce another vampire film with Sandra Julien immediately afterwards, called ***Docteur Vampire*** (“Dr. Vampire”). That title was her idea and she announced it, so nobody else could use it. I was supposed to write a script but unfortunately, she died before the project could become a reality.



Clowns playing a graveyard piano—the inspirational image of REQUIEM POUR UN VAMPIRE.

Tell me something about the history of *Requiem pour un Vampire*, one of your most successful films.

During the shooting of *Le Frisson...*, I met Lionel Wallmann. He was an American in charge of selling the film to foreign countries. We became friends, and he asked me, "Why don't we try to raise the money for a film together?" I wrote a screenplay, he found money and arranged something with Sam Selsky. The result was *Requiem...*, a little film made with almost no money. I like it very much, because I tried something different. I think there is no dialogue in the film for the first 40 minutes; I wanted to create the ultimate naïve film, to simplify story, direction, cinematography, everything. Like a shadow, an idea of a plot. Later, I made an even more extreme film in that mode, called *La Rose de Fer* ("The Iron Rose," 1972). I wanted to make a film that was like a fairy tale told by someone at a campfire, invented as it was being told. I wrote the script without a plan, without construction, and that's also the way I shot it.

What about your use of symbols? Clowns, for example, appear quite often in your

films—in *La Rose de Fer*, *Requiem...* and *Les Démoniaques*—yet I don't think you have a special affection for the circus.

No, not in particular. These are just ideas, images which represent an emotion. I also put them into my films to add an element of the strange and absurd. It's like a mask. For *Requiem...*, I had some ideas and put them in the screenplay for no special reason. First the clowns, then the motorcycle, and the idea of the girls playing piano in the cemetery. The first vision I had was two clowns playing piano in a cemetery. I have never seen that in a film before and I *wanted* to see it, so I just wrote it in. Afterwards, I reused the image of the clowns in other films as some sort of quotation. I like that; I often make references to my earlier films. It connects dreams and stories like a construction system and the audience can make their own thing out of it.

You are talking about very ambitious things, yet your films were hardly treated seriously, either by audiences or by critics. Weren't you incredibly frustrated at times? Didn't you feel misunderstood? Just

look at the retitlings of some of your films in certain countries!

Do you mean **CAGED VIRGINS** for *Requiem pour un Vampire* in the United States, or “Sexual Terror of the Unleashed Vampires” for *Le Frisson...* in Germany? [LAUGHS] I never really understood what audiences thought about my films. *Requiem...* was fairly successful here in France. During one screening, I sat in the audience to listen to what the people said about it. Some just came because of the nudity, some came because it was a vampire film, and others came because they wanted to see something unusual and bizarre. There is no typical audience for my films, and this leaves me in a kind of vacuum. Do you know what I mean? I often had the impression that I did what I was doing solely for myself.

As far as retitlings are concerned, certainly it is quite embarrassing, but there is nothing I can do about it. I mean, I was happy that one of my films was going to be shown in another country at all—a sold **CAGED VIRGINS** is better than an unsold *Requiem pour un Vampire*!

Is it true that Lionel Wallmann was responsible for your attempts at straight sex fare with *Jeunes Filles Impudiques*?

That’s right. Lionel obliged me to put some sex scenes in *Requiem...* during the dungeon sequence. I told him that I wasn’t too fond of that kind of thing, and he answered: “But you do that kind of thing very well. If we made an entire film like that, I bet it would be successful. You may not like it, but you know how to do it.”

I said, “Okay, I’ll do it, but I won’t invest any of my own money into it.” Well, he raised the money, we made the film, and he was right. The two sex films I made, this one and *Tout le Monde il en a Deux* (1974) were very successful.

***Tout le Monde...* was later reissued under the title *Bacchanales Sexuelles* with hardcore inserts. Did you direct these scenes?**

I have never seen this version, so I don’t know what scenes were in it. I never shot any hardcore scenes for that film, but we went to the very limit of softcore because Lionel wanted to have something really spectacular and porno wasn’t legal at

Mirielle Dargent and Marie-Pierre Castel (foreground) make their escape in REQUIEM POUR UN VAMPIRE.



that time. We did two different versions of the film. For one, which was eventually released as ***Tout le Monde...***, I cut out certain scenes which I considered too long, or a bit too explicit. Thus, I don't know if this reissue is simply the original cut, or a version spiced-up with real hardcore inserts filmed by someone else. Should the latter be the case, I don't have anything to do with it.

It is said that had a lot of problems on Les Démoniaques because it was a Belgian coproduction.

We had to change everything because of that. We had to get Belgian actors and technicians. It was our first co-production and my largest budget up to that time. Even with the Belgian money involved, we were close to leaving it unfinished. There was one week of shooting ahead of us, and we had absolutely no money left. We were in despair and really didn't know how to go on. So, we all went into a little bar where the director of photography got drunk every night. They were selling lottery tickets there, and that night, they had only one ticket left. Lionel bought it, just for fun, and he won about 100,000 Francs! We were saved!

But that's only one story. I had terrible problems, because during the first week of shooting, Lionel, who was producing for his company Nordia Film, stayed in Paris to check the rushes, which we sent him from the little island where we were shooting. We booked a little castle on the island, which belonged to Louis Renault of the automobile company. There were numerous free rooms and an old keeper and we stayed there for the whole time. After Lionel saw the rushes, he rushed to the island immediately and said that everything we had done so far was absolutely dreadful and unusable, and that we would have to shoot everything again! I was very disappointed and I didn't understand what was going on. So there I was, sitting on this island, feeling the pressure of having turned the efforts of an entire week into unusable crap. When I finally saw the rushes myself, I was quite surprised, because everything was fine and perfectly usable. It was exactly what I wanted! Lionel didn't understand the difference between rushes and finished film, and so he learned the importance of adding sound and music.

I also had a lot of problems with two actresses who were supposed to play the leading parts. We found two very attractive, young girls who worked in an office near mine, and I offered them the parts. Everything was fine until somebody told them that, if they made a film with me, I would make them walk the streets as prostitutes to raise money for

the film's financing! And they believed it! I never found out who did it. As you can see, I had a very bad reputation at that time, and my films were also infamous, which certainly did not help.

We shot the film on this little island, and once every year, there is a big equinox and in this period, about one week, no boat can leave or reach the island. Of course, it happened exactly when we were there [LAUGHS]! All of a sudden, we found ourselves prisoners of the island. No restaurant, no hotel, nothing! We had to cook for ourselves. The only thing we had were those crabs. We had bought dozens because we needed them for the film. So when we were done with them, Lionel (who is an excellent cook) prepared them for us and we all ate crabs for one week! As you can imagine, after that, none of us was interested in looking at crabs for a very long time! So there you have another great story which helped my reputation! Rollin is the only director who eats his actors after filming them [LAUGHS]!

Actor Willy Braque had a very peculiar reputation.

He was completely crazy during this period. He also tried directing several times, but never managed to finish his films. He prepared everything, the screenplays were quite good, but as soon as the camera began rolling, he freaked out and couldn't go on. What can I say? He went mad, first him, and then his poor producers [LAUGHS]!

José Benazeraf is said to have seen Les Démoniaques and liked it so much that he introduced you to Mylene D'Antes, who starred in your film Phantasmes ("Ghosts," 1975).

Yes, she had worked with him before. I met Benazeraf a couple of times. He is not really a friend, but I like him. He is really a weird person. I know that Brigitte Lahaie is not so fond of him; he is said to behave strangely with women on the set, but I cannot comment on that, as I have never seen him directing a film.

When Les Démoniaques opened in France, porno was legalized. Since you already mentioned your dislike of sex scenes for Requiem..., I guess you were not one of those directors who thought porno might be a new "genre" where one could explore new possibilities?

Actually, I did think so at that time. I was sure that, with this type of film, one could come up



Willie Braque (center) at bay
in LES DÉMONIAQUES.

with something new and of interest. I tried with **Phantasmes** but failed miserably. The reason for the death of French “hardcore culture,” if you want to use that term, is that the audience just doesn’t care. They don’t want cinema, they want people screwing and that’s it. That’s why after **Phantasmes**, I made my porn films in a rather uninspired way. I was very disappointed with the failure of that film. I really tried to make something out of it and nobody gave a damn. It was a porno with a real story, with real direction and real actors. The Castel Twins were in it again, for example. Knowing what I know now, I would say it is impossible to turn pornography into something of interest. There is simply no market. I don’t like the other porn films I did, that’s true, but I enjoyed shooting them. I made the acquaintance of a lot of very interesting people and I have respect for them. Today, the actors only do it for money, but back then, it was something different. Some of them did it because they wanted to explore their desires, some because they wanted to enter the film business, but they all had something in common. They were proud of what they did, like a little group of outsiders, because they did something which most

people didn’t dare to do. It was some sort of rebellion, a statement, and it was honest.

What were your feelings about shooting hardcore? I can imagine it must have been a rather awkward experience.

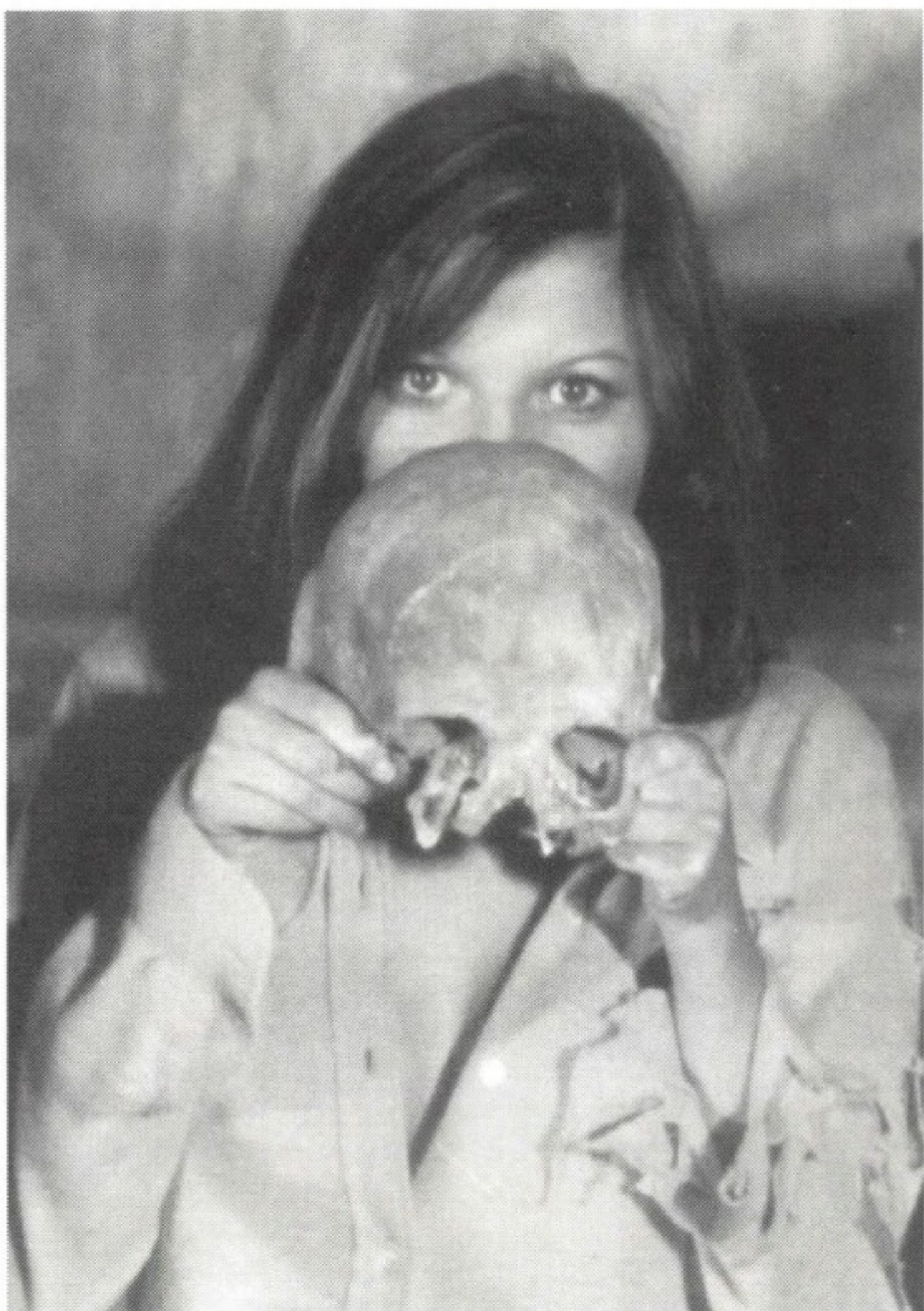
It is not so difficult, because the people playing in porno films are usually not trained actors and they liked what they were doing, especially back then. It was a very nice atmosphere and everybody behaved very naturally. All we had to do was to film the action. It’s strange, but it was much more embarrassing for me to shoot my first softcore film, **Tout le Monde...**; I walked off the set one day, because I just couldn’t direct phony lovemaking. When it became real, I had no problem at all. I really don’t know why. Maybe because in softcore films, the only person revealing his obsessions is the director, because he has to call the shots while the actors simply do as they are told. In porno, both the actors and director are in the same position. One reveals his obsessions, and the actors live them out, so there is nothing to be ashamed of.

Without a doubt, La Rose de Fer is your least commercial film and a very risky experiment as well. I think it is one of your best films, but I can also imagine the difficulties of making a film about two people walking around who are locked inside a closed cemetery.

I knew it would be a commercial disaster. I knew it from the very beginning, but I didn’t care. At that moment, it was very important for me to make a very serious, profound film, far away from the softcore stuff I’d done previously. The story of that film was based on a short story I wrote, about six or seven pages long, which I published in a little magazine.

I had a lot of problems with the leading actor, Hugues Quester. He didn’t like me, which was quite a problem, because there are only two persons in the film, so we had to work together all the time. This eventually led to him taking his name off the film, so now, Hugues Quester is credited as “Pierre Dupont.”

I financed the picture completely with my own personal money, knowing that I would never get it back, but I had a safety net in mind. I knew I would lose everything, but Impex Film had offered me a deal to direct six or seven hardcore films in the next couple of years. Therefore I knew, even though I wouldn’t have a penny left after making this film,



LE ROSE DE FER

I would have plenty of work and get it back because of this porno assignment. So I made **La Rose de Fer** without any hesitation. I love this film very much. It is definitely one of my most personal efforts.

This has also been said about *Levres de Sang* ("Lips of Blood," 1974).

The original script certainly, but the resulting film.... well, it's like my other films. I had a really complex story in mind, with a lot of structure. I had a lot of problems because I lost one week of shooting. I was given four weeks, and on the very first day on the set, one of the producers backed out, so one entire week had to be cancelled. We had to rearrange and shorten things drastically from one day to the next, so I tried to keep all the sequences which were important to me, while getting rid of many others which were important to the film's structure and rhythm, so it certainly suffered in the end.

Les Raisins de la Mort is one of the very few French gore films. Was it your idea?

No, the idea came from Jean-Marc Ghanassia, a young producer who was also involved in **Levres**

de Sang. He lost everything on that one, so he wanted me to make a film that would yield some profit for him. It was the time of the disaster films, and he wanted something similar, something present in our every day lives which suddenly turns dangerous and lethal. I proposed wine and tobacco. He chose the former, so we made **Les Raisins de la Mort**. It was the first non-erotic film I made with Brigitte Lahaie. I directed her previously in a porn film, **Vibrations Sensuelles** ("Sensual Vibrations," 1976), and I found her to be a distinctly different personality. I thought it would be interesting to take her outside the boundaries of porn and put her in a Rollin film. She was different, very different, and she has an incredible charisma. Her presence is absolutely striking. Also, I think she is very talented and a very nice person.

We shot in a deserted mountain region here in France, called Les Saivennes, and it was so incredibly cold that we had to build a special shelter for the camera because otherwise it wouldn't turn at 24 frames per second. I remember the scene in which Brigitte had to undress herself. There she was, naked, and supposed to deliver her lines, but when she opened her mouth, she literally couldn't speak because it was so cold. I was very, very hard on everybody. No coffee, no place to get warm, and Brigitte kept her temper remarkably well. There is one scene with Brigitte and the dogs which was my *hommage* to Mario Bava's **BLACK SUNDAY**. She reminded me a lot of Barbara Steele; her face is also very enigmatic. One might think that directing a porn actress would be difficult, but she was very disciplined and professional. It was a pleasure to direct her. She was interested in breaking into the normal film business and she actually managed to create a second career. She is very popular here in France, writing books, appearing on TV and also acting in live theater sometimes.

After the extreme gore of *Les Raisins de la Mort*, you returned to a more familiar style with *Fascination* (1979), an erotic vampire film of sorts. It's one of your best-known and best-liked films; what can you tell about its origin?

The title and general flair of the film is an *hommage* to a French magazine of the same name, dedicated to all kinds of eroticism in art, which was edited by my friend Jean-Pierre Bouyxou, who also worked with me on **Les Raisins de la Mort** and **La Morte Vivante**.

It was shot inside an old, very elegant and luxurious château, with a discrete entrance through

the woods, which was renowned as a haven for rich people who wanted to spend some intimate time with their spouses or lovers. My co-producer wanted me to make a very explicit sex film—straight exploitation fare without too much emphasis on the fantastical elements—so we had a constant battle during the shooting (which I won eventually, much to the disappointment of my “enemy”) [LAUGHS]! I got the idea for the film from a French short story, Jean Lorrain’s “*Un Verre de Sang*” (“A Glass of Blood”), where I learned for the first time about wealthy French people at the turn of the century drinking the blood of bulls as a curative for anemia.

I like **Fascination** very much. It is very close to what I envisioned, very romantic and savage at the same time. It has a truly enigmatic, predatory atmosphere and some great images, such as Brigitte Lahaie wielding the scythe, or the opening scene in the slaughterhouse. It’s quite arty, and although it is a vampire film, it pretty much avoids the pulp ideas which I usually work into my scripts.

Let’s talk about a very special film which is not exactly a highlight in your curriculum vitae: *Le Lac des Morts Vivants* (“Zombie Lake,” 1980). Jess Franco was supposed to direct this Eurociné project, so how come you ended up becoming the scapegoat?

[LAUGHS] Well, Jess Franco just didn’t show up. That’s all. It was the day before shooting and nobody knew where he was. No trace of him, nothing. I was about to go on holiday when the phone rang. It was the production company, Eurociné, who asked if I was interested in shooting a film for them. I said: “Why not? When do you need me?” and they replied “You start tomorrow.” I didn’t read the script, I knew nothing about the film except that it was about zombies, and the producer explained to me each morning what I was supposed to shoot. I never took this project seriously. Howard Vernon was in that one. He knew what type of film he was appearing in, and I knew what type of film I was directing, so we had a lot of fun. Eurociné is really a weird company. I am not really 100% sure, but I think they really believe in what they are doing. I mean, I believe they think films like **ZOMBIE LAKE** are good horror films! They live on another planet! It is so weird, it’s good. I also did some other things for them—some more zombie footage which, from what I have heard, was used to spice-up another Jess Franco film. [Rollin’s footage was added to Franco’s **A VIRGIN AMONG THE LIVING DEAD** (1970)—Ed.] And then there was **CHASING BARBARA**, a short

which I shot in Madrid in the frontgarden of my hotel [LAUGHS]! Of course, this was supposed to represent a jungle! “See those flowerpots? Let’s shoot a jungle epic in there” [LAUGHS]

What do you think about Jess Franco? Your visual style is sometimes compared to his.

I met him once in the office of Eurociné. I don’t think it is appropriate to compare his films with mine. We have completely different views of cinema, I think, and also our working styles are very different. It’s not the same spirit. I haven’t seen many of his films. I’ve liked some of them, but I cannot see a connection between the two of us.

In 1983, you directed *La Morte Vivante*. Theresa Ann Savoy was originally supposed to play the title role. Why did she drop out?

I went to Rome to see Theresa. The very first time we saw each other in her agent’s office, she said she would never work with me under any circumstances. I don’t know why. I think she was slightly out of her mind [LAUGHS]. I was very disappointed, because it was a dream of mine to make a film with her. I saw her in a couple of films and liked her very much. We eventually cast Françoise Blanchard for that role.

The shooting was terribly hard for Françoise. She collapsed during the final scene; the one where she has to kill her girlfriend and is covered with blood. The stench of the fake blood was awful, she was tired, and the shoot was quite complicated; I sensed that something terrible would happen sooner or later. When she had to freak out in front of the camera for the final shot, everybody was silent after I said “cut” because nobody was sure whether she was just acting or collapsing for real. Everybody stared at her until she looked at us in surprise and said: “Well, are we finished now or what?” Unfortunately we were not finished yet, and later, she collapsed for real on the entrance stairs of the castle, from sheer exhaustion. We called a doctor, so there she was, naked and covered with fake blood, and the doctor—an innocent guy from the countryside—was on the verge of calling the police, because he suspected we were a bunch of psychopaths holding nasty orgies in that castle. We told him that the blood wasn’t real, but he only believed us when Françoise assured him “I’m not a human sacrifice, I’m just dead on my ass!” [LAUGHS]

Marina Pierrot was also in that film, who played in Walerian Borowczyk’s **Dr. Jekyll et**



*Françoise Blanchard feasts on the throat of warm-blooded lover
Marina Pierro in LA MORTE VIVANTE.*

les Femmes. I enjoyed working with her, although I have to say she was very vain and was more preoccupied with her appearance than anything else. I had a lot of discussions with her, because she thought I wasn't presenting her properly on the screen.

Are you pleased the way the film turned out?

Mmmh, yes... I think there are some very good things in it. Of course, we had to make certain commercial concessions. The whole idea of the chemical waste was not very good, it was just thrown in for better or worse. It would have been better if this girl had come back from the dead because her girlfriend hadn't kept her end of their suicide pact. However, commercially, it was the most successful film I ever made. I even won the Special Audience Prize for it at the Fantafestival in Rome. I like very much the part in which the living dead girl returns to the castle and finds all these toys and telephones her friend. It was interesting to do that. Maybe we should have enlarged this part. An American writer was there to translate the dialogue into English, and eventually he shot a few of the English spoken scenes with the American actors. Mike Marshall is in it, the son of French actress Michele Morgan and Bill Marshall.

You previously mentioned Les Trottoirs de Bangkok. Was this your long overdue homage to the serials you loved so much as a child?

Correct. It's a very small film, but I like it a great deal. It was really difficult to find a suitable actress for the leading role. I was seeing actresses for weeks, but I just couldn't find the type of heroine I was looking for. It really became a problem, so Lionel told me that he knew an Asian girl who would be perfect. Then the first day of shooting came; I still had no leading actress, and we all were waiting for Lionel to come and bring the girl along. We were shooting at a harbor, and then, Lionel's car appeared in the distance. Everybody was happy, but when he got closer, I saw that he was alone. "That's it," I thought. "We're finished." The car stopped and suddenly the front passenger door opened and there she was: Yoko. She was so small that she remained invisible inside the car. And she was just perfect. I knew from the first moment I saw her that she was exactly what I had envisioned.

***T*here is some confusion about a film called *Ne Prends pas les Poulets pour des Pigeons* (1985). Sometimes, it is said that you only wrote the screenplay and that the leading actor, Jean-Claude Benhamou,**

directed. Then again, you are named on-screen as director.

No, I really did it. Benhamou was the producer, writer and lead actor, so now, he sometimes seems to confuse things and claims to have directed, as well. That said, it was completely his story. It was only a technical direction. I only did what he wanted me to do, because I didn't really care.

You also finished *Emanuelle 6* (1987), reportedly because director Bruno Zincone ran into some problems?

He couldn't cope with shooting in South America. When Zincone came back after six weeks of filming in Venezuela, he had only 45 minutes of usable film. To make things worse, he couldn't go back and finish it because he had another job to do right afterwards. Sam Selsky, the producer, needed the film to be finished as soon as possible because of the availability and cost of the actors, and also because of fixed agreements with the distributor. I was asked to finish it, so I rewrote the script, came up with the idea of *Emanuelle* having lost her memory, and tried to make some sense of the whole thing, which was quite a hopeless attempt.

***Perdues dans New York* ("Lost in New York," 1989) was made for TV.**

A friend of mine, Jacques Nahum, a TV producer, needed some stock shots of New York. He asked me if I could take care of that, so he gave me lots and lots of 16mm negative material and some money, and I went over there and shot what he needed. While I was in New York, I came up with the idea to use this occasion and make a little film for myself.

When I showed the results to Jacques, he liked it and said we could try to make something out of it. He allowed me to keep the material and gave me some more money, so I constructed an hour-long story around the material. It's the story of two girls who find the statuette of an African goddess, which allows them to travel through time and space, and also the worlds of film and literature. We tried to sell it to a TV channel, but nobody wanted to have it.

It is a very beautiful film and I think it is a little gem that deserves to be seen. I made it at a time when I seriously considered abandoning the cinema because of the dreadful production circumstances. In a way, *Perdues dans New York* was supposed to be my good-bye to everybody who stuck with me over the years and loved my work. It is a "Best of Jean Rollin," full of quotations and

homages. And although it was made in a very chaotic way, I think the result is one of my finest films.

***La Griffe d'Horus* (1990) was another TV project that remains in limbo.**

One day, a guy named Gérard Dôle called me up and asked for a meeting. He said he was a specialist on famous pulp-detective Harry Dickson and that he had also written a collection of related stories called *THE NEW ADVENTURES OF HARRY DICKSON*. He thought I was the only person in the world capable of bringing Harry Dickson to the screen. Of course, I was very proud of that, so I said "Okay, let's give it a try."

We approached Channel 1, and they were interested, but they said they would have to buy the rights to the character first. The problem was, the original stories were written by Jean Ray, and the film rights are absolutely impossible to get; the more recent ones were written by anonymous writers, which makes the matter equally difficult. We found a small publisher called C'ur Neuf who had the rights to some of the stories not written by Ray himself. Dôle and I met with them to make a deal, and the very first thing out of their mouths was: "Jean Rollin will never touch Harry Dickson as long as we live!" They *hated* me—*really* [LAUGHS]! Dôle was furious, of course, but he said he would write an original Harry Dickson story and we could film it on video, so he wrote the story of *Griffe d'Horus*. I wrote a 26-minute TV script and we tried to make an arrangement, maybe presenting the character under a different name because of this legal problem, but it didn't work out. We only shot about two minutes of it, just a screen test to see whether we managed to create the right atmosphere.

There was this guy, Jean-Michel Nicollet, and he was obsessed with Harry Dickson. He did the cover photography of some of the book-reprints and he photographed himself in the adequate outfit, so we decided to use him for *Griffe d'Horus*. We shot it in one afternoon and everybody involved was so pleased with the result that Dôle said he was willing to make an entire feature film that way. However, the project is dead, unless we should decide to do it just for fun, an amateur film shot on video with some friends.

You were really on the verge of abandoning the cinema during this period?

I was very depressed and frustrated. I really wanted to abandon directing altogether. It was impossible to raise money for films, nobody cared, I seemed to be on a TV blacklist because I couldn't get work at any of the channels. That's when I

decided to focus more on writing and I turned a lot of my screenplays, which I couldn't produce as films, into novels. It helped me a lot, because I was finally able to do what I wanted once again, without any financial limitations at all. I had a screenplay called **Bestialité**, which, at one point, was supposed to be made as a co-production with Russia, but once again, it turned out to be just another waste of time. It was a story I wrote for Brigitte Lahaie and Yoko. It involved an old Ambassador who returns from India and brings with him a strange animal, some sort of wolf. His daughter, played by Brigitte, develops a very special relationship with the beast until, one night, the beast transforms into a beautiful exotic woman and they become more than friends. There is also some sort of initiation where Brigitte turns into a wolf. At the end, both are killed by the Ambassador.

Then there was a project called **Enfer Privé** ("Private Hell"), again written for Brigitte and Yoko. This time, she was supposed to play an aristocratic woman discovering a young woman living like a wild animal at a beach. She takes her home, but only to arrange a hunting like in **THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME**. René Chateau wanted to produce it—he was living with Brigitte at that time—but he wanted to include porn-inserts shot by another director, with different actors, afterwards. I declined and eventually turned it into a novel.

You eventually returned to directing with *La Femme dangereuse* ("The Dangerous Woman," 1993), also known as *KILLING CAR*, which took two years to complete.

After we finished shooting, I became seriously ill, and everything stopped for a couple of months. I did the editing when I recovered. We did that on video, so no usable print or negative of **KILLING CAR** exists. It was made for TV and video, but I like it. It's quite different from my other films. It's a thriller, a revenge story of a woman hunting down numerous people who did something awful in her past. I know that it's no masterpiece, but I think it is quite good considering the budget we had. I mean, we made it in 10 days. It cost only \$ 100,000 and was shot in 16mm, so it really is a small film. I wrote it for the leading actress, Txiki Chan, because I liked her so much. I wanted to do something with her.

In 1994, you wrote the screenplay for another porn film: *Le Parfum de Mathilde* ("The Scent of Mathilde").

When Michele Ricaud, the most popular French porn director of recent years, died, every

other porn director tried to take his place. A producer named Marc Dorcel called me up and asked whether I might be interested. I can tell you that I also co-directed this film, though only Dorcel is credited. As you can imagine, that's something I am not too sad about. Dorcel said he wanted me because he wanted someone who had a different approach. He wanted to come up with something unique after Ricaud's death—a porn film with a story, with meaning, and he thought the fantastic might be a good possibility. During that project, I realized how much that business had changed in all those years. The resulting film is just a typical porno, not a good film at all.

How would you explain the sudden increase of interest in your films? Only two years ago, as you say, hardly anybody gave a damn.

Honestly, I am completely surprised about all that. My films will be re-released on video in France and Belgium very soon, I have sold six of them to Redemption in England, and Video Search of Miami has bought some rights for the States. I don't know what happened to bring this about, but I am certainly very happy about it. Maybe it's because of the return of the classical film monsters. Maybe it's because people are starting to get tired of the new American genre films. I don't go to the cinema very often anymore. I saw **MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN** by Kenneth Branagh; I didn't like it very much. I certainly saw **BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA** by Coppola—not a good film at all; it just doesn't work for one second. There is no real imagination. It's the work of a cinematographer and a set designer. Where is the *creator* in this film? Of course, it is very polished, but it cost \$50,000,000 so that's the *least* one can expect!

Those of us who have a special interest in the fantastic cinema want films which have character, which are different. Films which managed to preserve some culture. I think this may be the reason for my second spring. A lot of people have been telling me about a new Italian film by Michele Soavi, called **DellaMorte DellAmore**. They are all crazy about it, praising it beyond belief, so I am *very* curious to see that one. But I feel that the genre is about to die, as is cinema in general. The films being made today have nothing to do with my understanding of cinema.



Rollin's latest: *LES DEUX ORPHELINES VAMPIRES*.

As we speak, you will soon begin your first horror film in many years, *Les Deux Orphelines Vampires* (1995). The title makes an ironic reference to the classic French novel *LES DEUX ORPHELINES* by Adolphe D'Ennery, which was filmed by Riccardo Freda in 1966. A lot of people are eagerly anticipating your return to vampire cinema.

My recent increase in popularity has put me in a very favorable position. I am the producer, which means I have complete creative control, and I will have quite a good budget—about 3,000,000 Francs. The money is coming from a company which needs to invest because of tax reasons, and my novel (on which the film is based) also helped a lot, because they know that there will be an English edition sooner or later. We start filming in June, four days in New York and three weeks here in Paris. I added some very visual sequences in the screenplay and I am sure it will turn out to be a very nice film. I have the chance to work with an exceptionally good director of photography, Norbert Marfaing-Sintes, who lit the last two films by Duccio Tessari here in France, as well as many other feature films and commercials.

When we were shooting *Perdues dans New York*, we were lacking some scenes and

Monteillet was not available. Norbert did about nine short films with Natalie Perrey, who played one of the leading parts in *Perdues...*, so she just called him and he came to help us out. That's when we first met, so it is my way of saying "Thank you for this favor."

The story of *Les Deux Orphelines Vampires* involves two little blind orphans. They can only see at night because they are vampires and the film tells of their adventures. They meet strange creatures, a winged vampire lady, a wolf. There will be no nudity, but—rest assured—there will be some beautiful graveyard scenes, and it is very poetic and full of beautiful dialogue. Brigitte Lahaie will star in it, as will Tina Aumont, who plays "The Ghoul." The two orphans will be played by Alexandra Pic and Isabelle Teboul, two young actresses who have never worked in films before. I found them through a newspaper ad and they are absolutely gorgeous, as you will see.

I am quite happy at the moment. Things couldn't be going better for me and my two little vampire orphans. And who knows? Maybe someday I can go back to the other books I wrote, which started out as screenplays, and turn them into the films I originally intended...



LASERDISCS

By Tim Lucas



Vincent, playing his beloved Victrola, while pining for his beloved Victoria, in DR. PHIBES RISES AGAIN.

- **THE ABOMINABLE DR. PHIBES**
- **DR. PHIBES RISES AGAIN**

1971-2, Orion/Image
Entertainment #ID3077OR, D/LB,
\$59.99, 94m 23s/87m 51s

Conceived by screenwriters James Whiton and William Goldstein, this shortlived series is often applauded for giving Vincent Price the classic "monster" role his career had

previously lacked. On a more meaningful level, the Phibes films were an attempt to reinvent the silent fantastic crime serials innovated by Louis Feuillade (*Fantomas*, *Judex*) for the sound era, with their Art Nouveau grandeur, midnight death threats, and original silence largely intact. The formality of the *hommage* extends to the end titles, which formally group the players into The Protagonists, The Victims, The Law,

and Interested Parties. The films (at least the first of them) can also lay claim to evoking James Whale's particular flair for black humor better than just about anything else that came along in its wake. They also have their detractors: David Pirie, in his landmark 1973 work *A HERITAGE OF HORROR: THE ENGLISH GOTHIC CINEMA 1946-1972*, stated without further embellishment that **THE ABOMINABLE DR. PHIBES** was "perhaps the

worst horror film made in England since 1945."

In **THE ABOMINABLE DR. PHIBES**, Inspector Trout of Scotland Yard (Peter Jeffrey) is summoned to investigate the death of a prominent London doctor attacked in his bedroom by a large number of bats. This bizarre death follows closely that of another doctor, killed by bees. A pattern begins to emerge when another doctor, attending a masquerade ball, has his head crushed inside a shrinking frog mask, and another (Terry-Thomas) is literally drained of his blood in his own living room. A medallion left at the scene of this latest murder contains a Hebrew symbol, which a Rabbi (Hugh Griffith) uses to deduce the common thread behind these murders; namely, the 10 curses against Pharaoh found in the Old Testament—the curses of boils, bats, frogs, blood, hail, beasts, rats, locusts, the first born, and darkness. With the help of Dr. Vesalius (Joseph Cotten), chief surgeon at the hospital where the dead doctors were employed, it is learned that they all collaborated on a single case: a failed operation to save the life of Victoria Phibes (Caroline Munro), wife of concert organist Dr. Anton Phibes (Vincent Price), who was reportedly burned to death in an automobile accident while rushing to her bedside. Unknown to the authorities, Phibes survived the accident, used his knowledge of mechanics and acoustics to reconstruct his body, and is methodically exacting revenge against the surgical team he holds responsible for his wife's death.

At the time of its original release, **THE ABOMINABLE DR. PHIBES** received a great deal of attention as Vincent Price's 100th film (it wasn't), and for

Brian Eatwell's "Art Deco" set design (it was Art Nouveau), which can be easily taken for granted (even overlooked) in an age of music videos. Indeed, the film's stylish opulence was often misinterpreted at the time as the signature of a gifted director. But what stands out about Robert Fuest's film after a quarter century is its bubbly lack of substance, its narrative amorality (Phibes is listed as one of the Protagonists, rather than as the Antagonist), and its curiously elliptical presentation.

The movie begins with the serial killings already in progress (the death by boils occurs before the film begins); it is extremely skimpy on the details of Phibes' survival; and the character of Vulnavia (Virginia North)—Phibes' gorgeous, mute, female confederate—is an ellipsis in her own right. Is she Phibes' daughter? (Doubtful, given Victoria's youth in recent photos.) Is she Phibes' lover? (Again doubtful, given Phibes' singular devotion to Victoria.) Is she the *memory* of Victoria? (If so, wouldn't Caroline Munro have played the part?) The fact that Vulnavia is liquified by acid at the end of this film, yet returns in the sequel played by a different actress (Valli Kemp), only adds fuel to the mystery. On the other hand, the script's Monty Pythonesque humor (as when Trout's confused boss addresses him as "Pike" and "Bream," or when a victim impaled on a screw must be physically rotated free of its threads) has held up fairly well, and the performances are larky and fun.

DR. PHIBES RISES AGAIN, made the following year, picks up exactly three years later, as Phibes' zodiac-sensitive alarm clock replaces his embalming fluid with warm blood. This time,

Phibes' plans for a happy eternity with Victoria are thwarted by millionaire Darius Biederbeck (Robert Quarry), who has acquired an ancient Egyptian map—Phibes' former property—that will lead him to a Fountain of Youth somewhere along the Nile. Biederbeck has been artificially sustaining his youth for at least a century (by means which, like many miracles in this series, are never quite explained), but is running low, and is determined to preserve his youth for the sake of newfound love, Diana (Fiona Lewis). The format of the previous film is followed precisely, with Phibes and his new Vulnavia creatively engineering the deaths of Biederbeck's confederates (including Milton Parsons) with somewhat less creativity than before; there is no theme or method applied to the murders, apart from one fellow whose body is crushed between the screw-driven head- and foot-boards bits of a trick bed, after reading Henry James' *THE TURN OF THE SCREW*. The format is followed so closely, in fact, that both films climax with a race against time involving a key. Quarry does a fine job as Biederbeck, the story is buoyed by some notable guest appearances (including an oddly humorless one by Peter Cushing), and Scotland Yard's investigation yields some very funny bits of business—like the suggestion that Waverly (John Cater) almost makes when Trout (Peter Jeffrey) wishes for a ram outside the sealed door of Phibes' Egyptian hideout. But Price's performance and Fuest's direction are less inspired the second time out, and from those two indifferent blows, the film cannot quite recover.

The Phibes films were previously released by Vestron/Image

Entertainment in 1990 (#ID-6902VE). We have heard that Image originally planned this re-release to be a no-frills reissue of the earlier transfers, until Stephen Pickard located the original film elements during a trip to England. As far as **THE ABOMINABLE DR. PHIBES** is concerned, the new set is an immense letdown. Compared to the original Image release (or the Vestron Video cassette!), the new letterboxed transfer is far less colorful and gains only a sliver of information on the left side of the frame, while matting-out a great deal of top and bottom information. A good point of reference is Vulnavia's entrance (Chapter 4/4:29). In this shot, she appears in a burst of light in a doorway framed by two Art Nouveau faces painted on the surrounding walls. On the 1990 disc release, the face on the left is only half-visible, throwing the composition off-balance. In the new letterboxed transfer, the face is onscreen, but we can no longer see the marble stairs below the threshold, or the exquisitely cut window above the doorway. The full impact of this shot (and all the others) could have been salvaged simply by widening the aperture from 1.75:1 to a more appealing 1.66:1. The muted colors are also disappointing, when compared to what the previous release accomplished with less optimal materials. The mono soundtrack is erratic in quality, rising and falling slightly in volume as it cuts back and forth between *The Law* and *The Protagonists*, and an inescapable hiss underlines most of Side Two.

The transfer of **DR. PHIBES RISES AGAIN**, on the other hand, is markedly improved over the previous fullscreen Orion tape

and Image Entertainment laser-disc releases. Matted at 1.75:1, the picture removes insignificant image area at the top of the screen, while adding significant new information to both sides; nothing is added to the bottom. In two early instances, visual information appears which seems to confirm the adequacy of the upper and lower matte positioning. When the mirrored lid of Phibes' resting place opens, it stops with a neat sliver of space left between its edge and the upper matte. Likewise, in Chapter 39, at 18:47, there is a shot of Phibes riding his organ upstairs, a wall of blue falling down the screen as he rises; the accompanying music cuts off *exactly* at the moment the blue wall touches the bottom matte. The quality of the film's color and sound are also greatly enhanced in this new transfer, with the prologue sequence (a montage of rephotographed clips from the first film, which looked dark and grainy in original 35mm prints) looking as sharp as the rest of the picture for the first time. The side break is also quite effective.

Nevertheless, there is a limit to how much one can enthuse over a double feature composed of "Musically Edited Home Video Versions." In the case of **DR. PHIBES RISES AGAIN**, this indicates the removal of the original end titles music (Price himself singing a wonderfully nostalgic "Over the Rainbow") and its replacement with a reprise of Felix Mendelssohn's "War March of the Priests." (This re-recorded exit music has unfortunately been imposed on every video release of the film to date, though it is always shown on television with "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" intact.) This composition is also the key to

the minute musical differences between the two versions of **THE ABOMINABLE DR. PHIBES**. Image's previous disc (and Vestron's tape) used a different recording of this piece than was heard in theatrical prints, and mis-synchronized it to the action—so that the comic moment of Phibes raising his hands off the keyboard (which continues to play) occurred at a different point in the score. The new disc uses this same re-recorded music, but it has been re-synchronized to reflect its original placement in the film. This shows some very attentive work on someone's part. The second (and only other evident) musical change follows the death by bats, as Phibes descends through the floor while hunched over his keyboard. On the new disc, the music stops abruptly as the scene cuts away; on the previous release, the music fades out softly. (Thanks to Phibophile Mark Bessenger for providing these details.)

After two times at bat, and despite their best efforts, Image has failed once again to deliver a definitive Dr. Phibes Double Feature—though they have made obvious improvements. It won't be worth the effort of trying again until Orion bites the bullet on the music issue.

BITTER MOON

1993, New Line/Image
#ID2673LI, D/S/SS/LB/CC,
\$49.98, 139m 10s

At the risk of sounding clichéd, Image Entertainment's widescreen laserdisc of Polanski's recent "comeback" **BITTER MOON** [reviewed VW 25:8] marks a tremendous visual improvement over New Line's videocassette. In this age of super-wide disc

transfers and AC-3 surround sound, it can be easily forgotten how much a simple 1.85 frame can forfeit when cropped to full-screen video proportions. This particular film—photographed by Tonino Delli Colli (who also shot **ONCE UPON A TIME IN AMERICA**, which Peter Coyote is shown watching on a B&W television in one scene)—is a widely composed, non-anamorphic feature for which letterboxing is essential for full appreciation. The image is matted here to approximately 1.82:1 and looks ideal, which is (sadly) a rare compliment these days. The picture quality is also sharpened to such a degree that the film's eroticism is perceptibly heightened—during Emmanuele Seigner's candle dance, for instance, the fact that she is completely nude under her sheer chemise is much more apparent. The closed-captioning here is also heads above the usual standard, spelling out incidental French dialogue (without translation) as well as English

with very little paraphrasing.

BITTER MOON has no supplementary features, no audio commentary, and its widescreen presentation hardly qualifies as "wide," but this Image/New Line disc amplifies the experience of viewing this film much more than its "next-to-no-frills" heralding implies.

CASPER

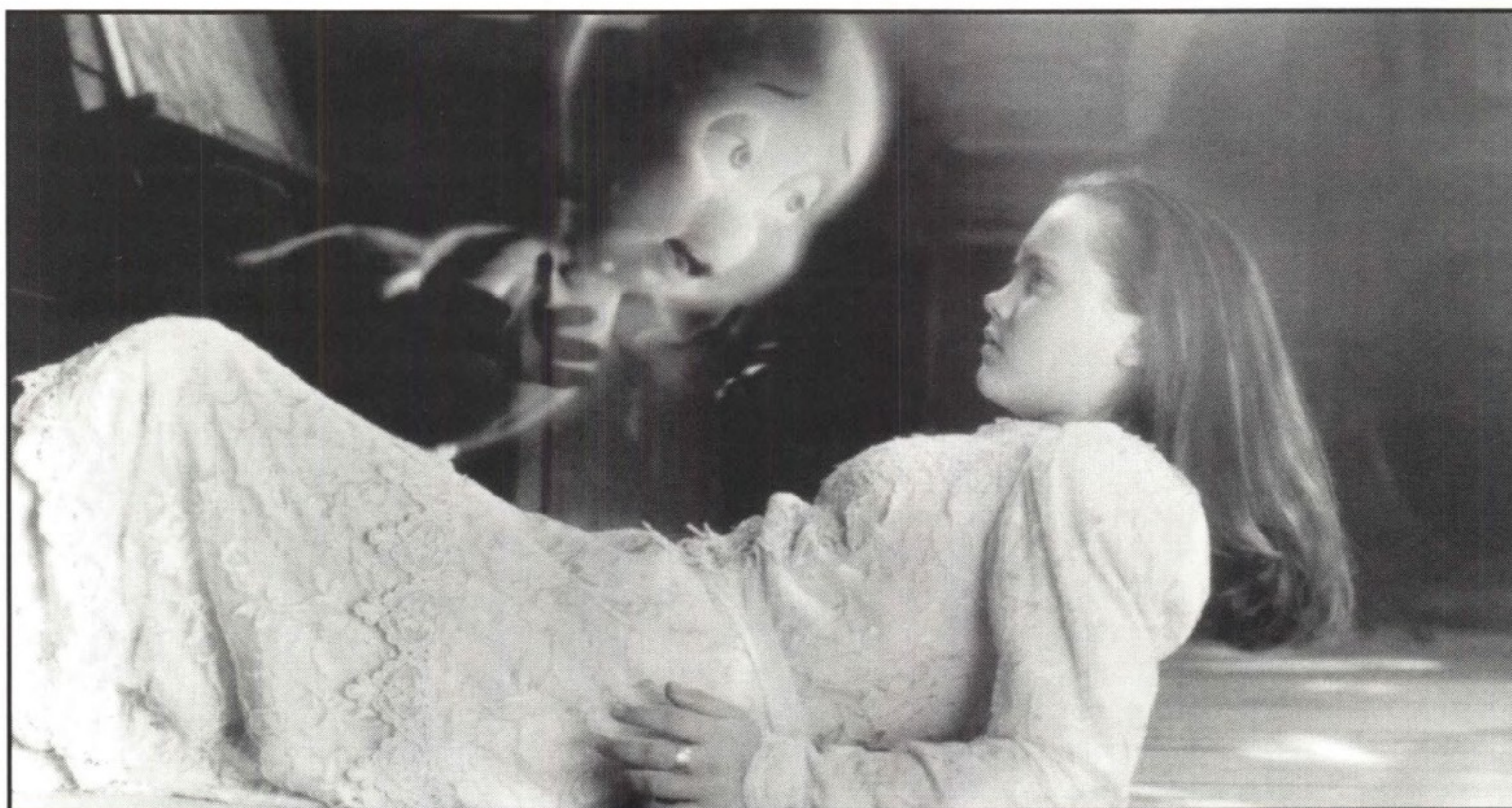
1995, MCA Universal #42571, D/S/SS/LB/CC/THX, \$34.98, 99m 53s

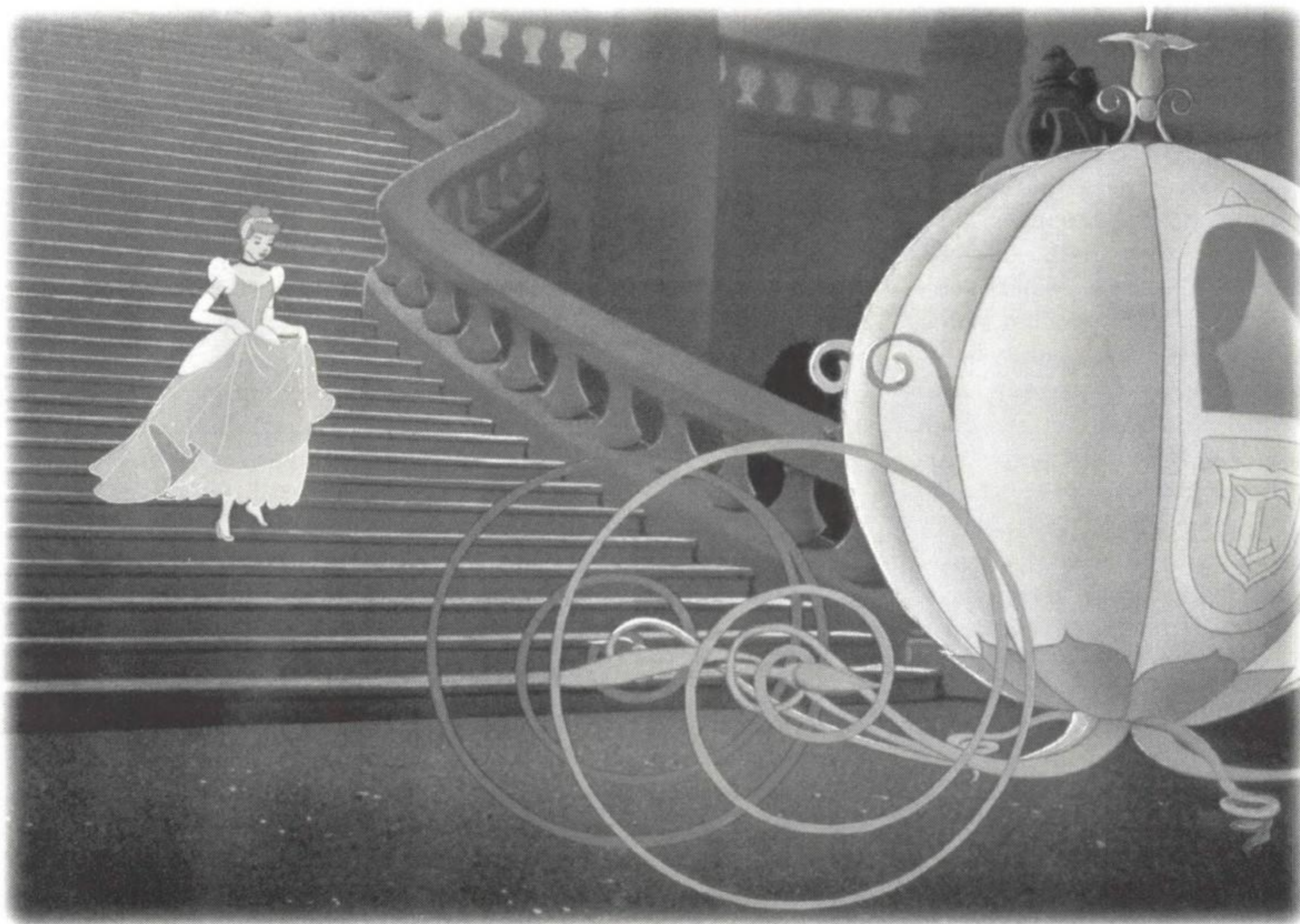
When Carrigan Crittenden (Cathy Moriarty) inherits derelict Whipstaff Manor from her wealthy uncle, she feels slighted until she learns of a hidden treasure on the premises. Unfortunately, she and her companion Tibbs (Eric Idle) learns that the Friendship, Maine property harbors more "Boo!" than booty—Whipstaff Manor is haunted by three vicious pranksters known as the Ghostly Trio, and their friendly nephew ghost, Casper. With Casper's help, Carrigan happens to see a TV news story about

Doc Harvey (Bill Pullman), a travelling expert in "the living-impaired" who—with his shy-but-cool daughter Kat (Christina Ricci)—investigates hauntings with the secret agenda of communicating with his late wife. The Harveys move into Whipstaff Manor and are given one week to dispel the ghosts, a mission which is complicated by Kat's friendship with Casper, the Ghostly Trio's giddy determination to take Poor Doc Harvey out of his misery, and the discovery of the Manor's treasure: The Lazarus Machine, a scientific contraption (invented by Casper's father) capable of restoring corporeal form to the dead.

This lavish Steven Spielberg production has little to do with the one-joke Harvey cartoon series on which it's based, but under the direction of Brad Silberling, it's one of the better sideshows Spielberg has sponsored to date. It's overwritten (by Sherri Stoner and Deanna Oliver), oversized and emotionally all over the map—sometimes

Poor CASPER hasn't a ghost of a chance with Christina Ricci!





touching on feelings over the heads and hearts of a child audience—but it's never overbearing or downright gruelling, like **THE GOONIES** (1985) or **THE FLINTSTONES** (1994). The film's watchability stems from Dean Cundey's richly atmospheric photography, Leslie Dilley's elaborate production design, and most of all, Dennis Muren's amazing digital character effects, which generate ghosts as fully believable as those played by flesh-and-blood actors (even moreso, in some cases). Viewers are also kept on their toes by a parade of amusing and unexpected cameos—as in one scene where Pullman watches helplessly as the Ghostly Trio “morph” his face in some hilariously famous directions. Pullman (memorable in Mike Figgis' highly underrated

LIEBESTRAUM) interacts with his intangible gho-stars extremely well, and Ricci (“Wednesday” in the recent **ADDAMS FAMILY** films) continues to show signs of developing into one of the genre's most endearingly morbid stars.

MCA's THX-approved letterboxed transfer is matted at approximately 1.80:1, and looks virtually free of deleterious cropping. The side break is well-placed, as are the chapter marks (though the titles given them on the index may give away some surprises to first-time viewers). The matrixed surround soundtrack is a room-rumbling joy from beginning to end, lending the perfect degree of support to ILM's dazzling special effects. Despite one or two meaningless lapses of taste (“A girl is in my bed... *YES!*” our friendly boy ghost exclaims

at one point), **CASPER** is a breezy slice of matinee fodder, and should make perennial good viewing for young Devils and Angels and Mighty Morphin Power Rangers as they chew over their earnings on Halloween nights for years to come.

CINDERELLA

1949, Walt Disney Home Video #4964ES (CAV), D/S/SS/CC/+, \$99.98, 74m 13s

Somewhat eclipsed by the simultaneous release of the “Deluxe CAV Letterboxed Edition” of “Walt Disney's Masterpiece” **THE LION KING**, is this far more tantalizing CAV boxed set devoted to Disney's first postwar animated feature. As animator Marc Davis remarks herein, **CINDERELLA** was the film that saved the Disney studio from bankruptcy—after a

long string of such costly “failures” as **PINOCCHIO**, **FANTASIA**, and **BAMBI**. The white, imitation leather box contains **CINDERELLA** in CAV, in its own colorful jacket; **CINDERELLA: THE MAKING OF A MASTERPIECE**, a separately jacketed 33m documentary with a second CAV side of supplements; a 43-page hardcover picture book, and a limited edition, four-panelled lithograph depicting Cinderella’s transformation from “little ash girl” to “prom queen” (Disney’s personal favorite moment from his animated productions) in four evolutionary stages, graduating from rough sketch to finished cel art.

The set is not only charming as entertainment, and attractive as a showpiece, but also surprisingly educational as an artifact, allowing us to witness the film’s development as a Disney project over the years, beginning with a 1922 “Laugh-o-Gram” cartoon short which Disney himself animated in Kansas City at the age of 21. “**Cinderella**” (7m 23s) was the last of six “Laugh-o-Grams,” and it *did* bankrupt Disney’s Kansas City operation, forcing him to move west to

Hollywood. A print of this precious relic (long considered lost) was recently recovered at a British garage sale, and it is presented in this boxed set for the first time. It depicts an Alice-like little girl, bookended by two buxom adult stepsisters, who wins the hand of an equally child-like Prince at a flapper’s ball. In 1933, Disney produced a “Silly Symphony” adaptation of the story (alas, represented here only by production sketches), and he began developing it as animated feature material as early as 1940. The documentary and supplement also closely attend the growth of this project over the following decade, including storyboards for deleted sequences, abandoned characters, live action model photography, and (on two separate analog tracks) various songs composed for, but not used in, the production.

The advertising heralding its first release proclaimed **CINDERELLA** “Disney’s Best Since **SNOW WHITE**,” which it certainly isn’t, but it does possess the magical quality of all

films that encapsulate the spirit of their time. It also has the perverse charm of a storyteller that talks *around* a story, rather than simply telling it. (The story proper does not begin until Chapter 9!) Here, the fable about a young woman—consigned to a life of filth and hard work by an unloving stepmother—whose impossible dream of attending the Prince’s ball is magically fulfilled, occupies only a small fraction of the running time; in its stead, we are treated to the struggles of the animals living in and around the stepmother’s chateau (only slightly less resplendent than the King’s own castle), as they work to reward the kindness our heroine has shown to them. Disney’s animators were never at their best with human subjects (which, as the bonus material aptly illustrates, were mostly rotoscoped), and this sleight-of-hand approach to the narrative allowed them to focus their talents where they would yield the greatest success: mice, cats, dogs and a heroine of simple, natural grace. The result is a film that, appropriate to the American mood of its time, celebrates hard work as the easiest way to achieve one’s goals, and argues that no goal is so worthy as a common goal. After years of fear and loneliness and forced work conditions imposed on homefront women by the War, **CINDERELLA** contained elements that no American—indeed, no one who survived the War years—could fail to understand. (Military terms were evoked in one of the rejected songs heard here for the first



◀ *Helene Stanley—the actress rotoscoped to create CINDERELLA—admires a selection of storyboards.*

time, as Cinderella wishes that she could duplicate herself to meet her impossible workload: "If we had a wish to wish, we'd be a regiment.")

If the film seems to occupy a lesser tier than Disney's earlier releases, it is perhaps because its moments of happiness are so short-lived, and because the Prince is so nondescript that Cinderella seems to disappoint us by loving the idea, rather than the fact, of him. (The film's happiest song, "Bibbity-Bobbity-Boo," is also lyrically nonsensical.) While the film's concepts of fulfillment are kept vague and unattainable, its cruelties and misfortunes run as cold and deep as in any animated Disney feature. The stepmother Lady Tremaine (voiced by the character's live action model, Eleanor Audley) is another classic Disney villainess, her narrowed eyes luminous with hatred as she locks her stepdaughter in an attic room. The stepsisters Anastasia and Drizella are too comical to take seriously, until the harrowing moment when they literally claw the dress made by Cinderella's animal friends from her body. (In terms of sheer horror, this rape-like scene ranks up there with Lampwick's transformation in **PINOCCHIO**.)

The feature occupies only three sides of the main, two-disc set; you may groan at first over the wasted space, but the supplementary disc delivers almost everything else you might desire on the subject. The CLV-format documentary is approached less like a shallow television special than other Disney "Making of" documentaries we've seen, and while rarities like the 1922 "Laugh-o-Gram" are not shown here in their entirety, they are wholly preserved on Side 2, in

CAV. Side 1's analog tracks contain a number of unused songs (which, at their best, seem too lyrically romantic or mature for this framework), and promotional radio broadcasts and commercial spots. There are 20 radio commercials in all, dating from 1950 and the 1957 reissue, and we doubt that anyone (except maybe Disney stockholders) could listen to the whole bunch without going mad.

Side 2 of the supplement also contains a valuable, extended chapter demonstrating how animators used live action footage of Cinderella model Helene Stanley to animate around her rotoscoped image; this section is also thoroughly footnoted with script notations and the names of the animators assigned to each sequence. There is also a lengthy chapter of storyboards for an abandoned sequence of a music instructor losing his patience with untalented Anastasia and Drizella, which would have been rather good. Our favorite supplementary chapter, 37, assembles various pieces of inspirational art and layout paintings, wherein the detail of the backgrounds can be savored in ways the feature itself does not permit. It never ceases to amaze us how much magic Disney artists could invest in a piece of stone, a piece of wood, light on a marble floor, or the embroidery of a cushion. Some pieces are shown in layers, beginning with the preliminary sketch, the finished background art, and the overlaid character cel. A 1956 appearance by Helene Stanley on *THE MICKEY MOUSE CLUB* shows her performing a song from the film (though Cinderella's songs were performed in the film by Ilene Woods). Six trailers, covering a period of 37 years, are included

(it's fascinating to watch the editing accelerate to a pace acceptable to 1987 audiences), along with a gallery of lobby cards and international poster designs. Testing the completist impulse is a mind-boggling tour of the film's promotional tie-ins, which ranged from hankies and scarves to anklets and dairy containers ("Now... Walt Disney's **CINDERELLA** gives you the greatest Cottage Cheese promotional theme the dairy industry has ever seen!"). The set ends with all the color panels of a syndicated comic strip, which appeared in Sunday newspapers from March to June 1950, written by Frank Reilly and illustrated by Manuel Gonzales and Dick Moores. The panels have been beautifully preserved and translated to disc.

CINDERELLA was previously released as Walt Disney laserdiscs (CLV and CAV) in 1988, and more recently as a bilingual CAV Japanese import disc. We haven't seen these versions, but we are told that this new transfer is noticeably superior. We can certainly testify to the beauty, clarity and rich color of the images, which look newly minted yet somehow more organic than the computerized wizardry of today's Disney fare; we can also attest to the superbly remixed surround track—which places orchestration behind the viewer, as voices emanate from front and center. This release is also unique in its isolation of the (mono) music and effects track on the second analog channel.

As presented in this deluxe boxed set, **CINDERELLA** becomes more than an entertainment; it becomes a monument to an idea and the long-term determination of a genius to see it realized. It's a valentine to victory.

DANGER: DIABOLIK

1967, Paramount Home Video
#LV6727WS, D/LB/CC, \$34.98,
99m 43s

Previously available only as an EP/SLP "sell-through" title from Paramount's cheapo branch Gateway Video, Mario Bava's **Diabolik** [reviewed VW 14:8] has now been released as a wide-screen laserdisc. There has been some controversy over the disc's letterboxing, which started when Sight & Sound (a Boston-based disc retailer) denounced Paramount in their catalogue for planning to letterbox this "Super Panoramico [2.35:1]" film at 1.85:1. In fact, "Super Panoramico" is not Italian for "Super Anamorphic" (as S&S assumed) but an Italian trademark for a

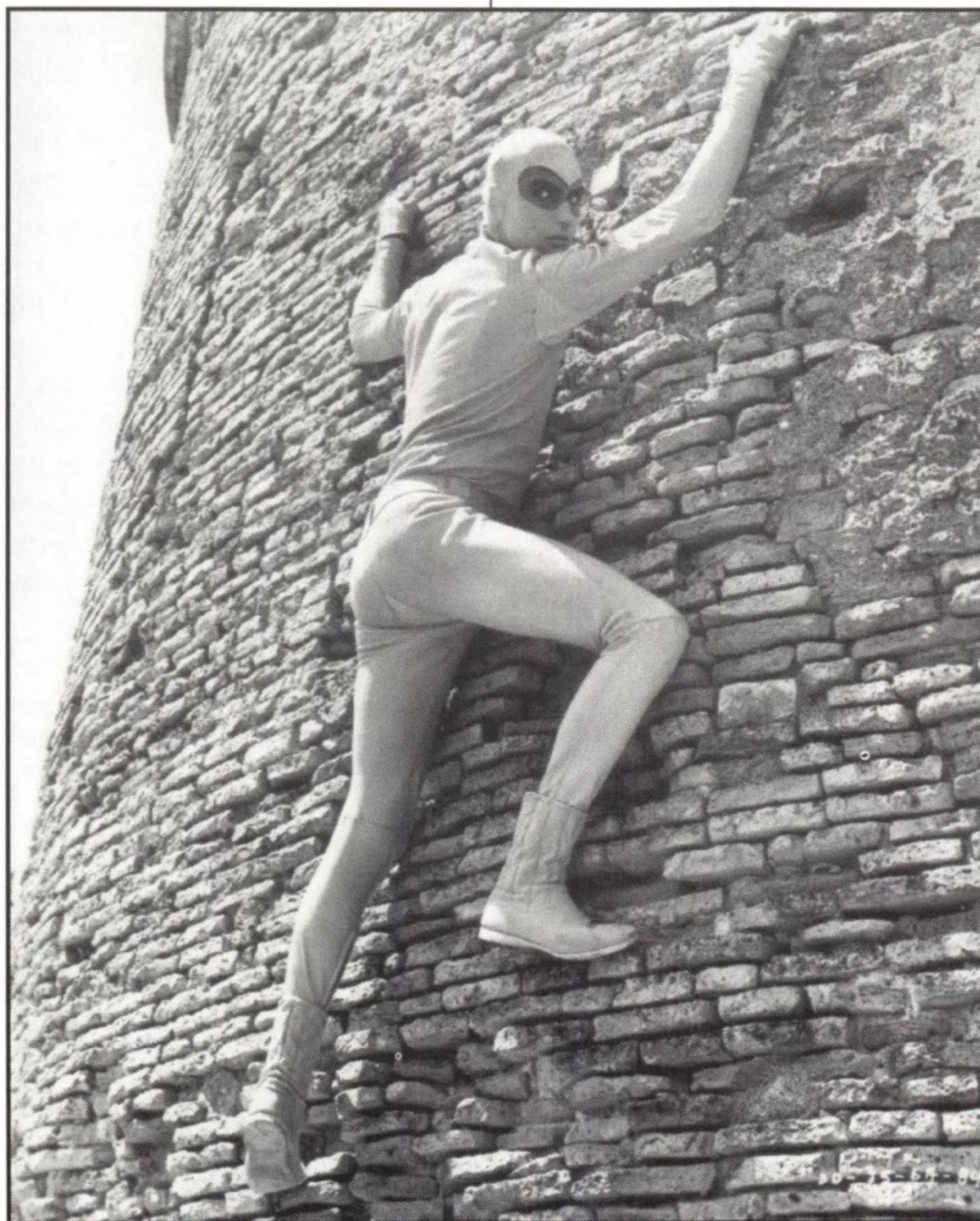
soft-matted "widescreen" process (as opposed to the usual European format of 1.75:1); indeed, when Paramount released the film in the United States, no wide-screen process was mentioned in their advertising. Paramount's new disc makes use of an Italian master print, with a synchronized English soundtrack, and their disc transfer has been matted in accordance with the hard-matting of the Italian title sequence ("*Diretto da Mario Bava*"), which measures approximately 2:1. It is therefore accurate to the original Italian theatrical presentation, but the transfer also points out some curious and fascinating flaws.

By comparing the disc side-by-side with Gateway's tape, we discovered that the opening sequence [0:50-05:17], ending with

the arrival of Inspector Jinko (Michel Piccoli) at the harbor, was filmed at 1.33:1; here, the disc mattes the full-screen image, erasing significant picture information while adding nothing to the sides. (This brief portion of the disc is a nuisance to those of us who like to see all of an actor's head onscreen when he's talking.) Then, as Jinko and his men approach the harbor, the tape becomes cramped-looking and atrociously pan&scanned, while the disc suddenly looks much better—still somewhat overmatted, but the actors and scenery fit more comfortably within the frame at all times. An excellent point of comparison occurs on Side 1, at 12:17, when Diabolik's black Jaguar XKE arrives at the hidden entrance to his hideout: on tape, we can see a single tree branch poking slightly into frame from the right, but on disc *the entire tree is visible*—plus some background sky besides!

The widescreen framing occasionally has a destructive effect on a couple of post-production opticals, such as the binocular POV shot on Side 2 (33:57), which is ranged so low onscreen as to be bisected by the lower matte. This and other unbalanced compositions suggest that the entire film may have been lensed at 1.33:1 (like the opening full-screen sequence) with the expectation that it would be matted at 1.75 or 1.85:1, only to have it subsequently overmatted to "Super Panoramico" to make it seem a more important production to the Italian public.

As we mentioned in our previous review, the Italian version utilized for this transfer is slightly longer than the US release, adding the wonderfully



◀ John Phillip Law scales the heights of Pop Art fantasy in *DANGER: DIABOLIK*.



Deborah Kerr and Pamela Franklin demonstrate Freddie Francis' CinemaScope framing in *THE INNOCENTS*.

trippy sequence of the police raid on a drug-laden discothèque, and an additional scene with British comedian Terry-Thomas (who dubbed his performance flawlessly). Sharp-eared viewers may also detect that John Phillip Law (who plays the master criminal Diabolik) dubbed a few background voices as well as his own. It may seem redundant to compare the disc favorably to an EP tape, but the transfer is not only wider, but also crisper and more deliciously colorful than the tape (which looks infinitely coarser by comparison, if you can get it to track at all). The side break is okay, the closed-captioning is fairly accurate, and regrettably, the film has not been chapter-encoded. There is also some evidence that Paramount did not press this important release in great quantities, so interested customers are advised to move swiftly, or be sorry.

THE INNOCENTS

1961, Fox Video #1318-85, HF/LB/+, \$39.98, 108m 52s

Jack Clayton's **THE INNOCENTS**, adapted by William Archibald and Truman Capote

from Henry James' classic novella *THE TURN OF THE SCREW*, is one of the few works of fantastic cinema remembered by *connoisseurs* as a masterpiece of anamorphic cinematography. Photographed in CinemaScope by Freddie Francis, the film was nominated for a Best Photography Oscar, but it has not been widely seen in this format for decades. The film still works on the nerves in its pan&scan TV prints, but these tend to pull the viewer by the nose toward offscreen sights not immediately apparent in the cropped framing, while Francis' original compositions tease the eye in unbidden directions—toward faces haunting the periphery or deep background—with the gentle but concentrated persuasion of a master. After a decade of being in the laserdisc business, Fox Video has finally gotten around to releasing this eagerly-awaited title as a "Wide-screen Edition" laserdisc (it remains unissued on cassette!), which can only reassert the film's already legendary status as the finest ghost story ever filmed.

It tells the story of a repressed Victorian governess, Miss Giddens (Deborah Kerr), who is hired by a

wealthy and irresponsible man (Michael Redgrave) to assume full charge of his country manor, Bly House, and his orphaned niece and nephew, Flora (Pamela Franklin) and Miles (Martin Stephens). Shortly after Miss Giddens' arrival at the sprawling estate, Miles is expelled from school as a "corrupting" influence, and the reunited children prove irresistibly charming. Giddens' gradual discernment of the dark side of their personalities coincides with her witness to the ghostly apparitions of her late predecessor Miss Jessel (Clytie Jessop) and the former groundskeeper, Quint (Peter Wyngarde), whose shameless revels—in the words of housekeeper Mrs. Grose (Megs Jenkins)—treated "rooms in broad daylight... as if they were dark woods." Knowing that the children were exposed to frank displays of this sadomasochistic relationship, and warned by Mrs. Grose not to mention the couple's names to the children, Giddens becomes convinced that this memory of evil must be purged from the children, before it contaminates them.

Under Clayton's refined and meticulous direction, the film is

superbly acted all around, with Kerr's staid governess convincingly "corrupted" by the atmosphere at Bly House, Megs Jenkins (who rather resembles Henry James) believably simple and superstitious as Mrs. Grose, and Franklin and Stephens delivering performances of astonishing maturity. (Stephens, who does his finest acting here, was cast on the strength of his intimidating performance as David in Wolf Rilla's **VILLAGE OF THE DAMNED**, and Franklin continued to give excellent performances as a young adult in such dark-themed films as **THE NANNY**, **OUR MOTHER'S HOUSE** and **THE LEGEND OF HELL HOUSE**.)

As far as the ghosts are concerned, it is not so much what the actors bring to their un-speaking roles as how their presence is manipulated inscreen. Clytie Jessop, seen only in long shot, makes a potent impression as woeful Miss Jessel, but that impression (as with Peter Wyngarde's Quint) is strangely geometrical. Her first appearance, in which she glides from one side of the screen to the other, is photographed head-on, and the shot feels anomalous in a sequence otherwise composed of angular set-ups and movements; one gets the distinct impression of movement within another dimension. Likewise, Wyngarde's first appearance introduces the possibility of sudden movement in depth, and his unexpected surge toward the camera (and Miss Giddens) imbues many later backgrounded apparitions—statues outside windows, background shadows, and so on—with the possibility of frightening forward thrust.

As we've often mentioned in past reviews, Freddie Francis photographed **THE INNOCENTS** with a self-made red iris filter that

deliberately framed his compositions in oval twilight, making the outer edges of the frame appear shadowy and mysterious; he later gave the filter to cinematographer Arthur Grant, who used it on two films Francis directed, **NIGHTMARE** (1963) and **DRACULA HAS RISEN FROM THE GRAVE** (1967). Knowing this, and seeing the filter at work in these other films, helps us to judge how well **THE INNOCENTS** has been transferred to disc. The disc's screen ratio is approximately 2.30:1, a tip-off that something is slightly askew. A comparison with a pan&scan TV version (taped from Cinemax) revealed that the frame has definitely been cropped at all four sides. In some shots, the iris is apparent only on the left or right; at other times, the illuminated oval is adequately centered, which pushes the twilight periphery largely offscreen. It seems likely that the telecine operator did not properly understand the cinematographer's intentions and so deliberately cropped out portions of the screen that appeared indistinct. Francis did not employ the iris filter in every shot, and we could at least tell from this transfer when the device was, and was not, used.

We must complement this criticism with a mention of how much this new transfer, despite its faults, added to our appreciation for Clayton's film and Francis' cinematography. Once the movements of the ghosts are established, the living characters are frequently arranged onscreen in deep-focused, foreground/background juxtapositions. This is impossible to recognize in any pan&scan presentation, which chops each composition into separate long and close shots. We were also knocked-out by the delirious widescreen montage of

Miss Giddens' dream sequence on Side 2, wherein we see Flora waltzing with Miss Jessel—in place of the mechanical ballerina—inside a giant music box. We've known this film all our lives, but this chilling image is one that we couldn't recall ever seeing before.

In a sense then, while the disc transfer is, technically, a vague disappointment, it also a vast improvement over what we had and loved before. The presentation is thoroughly chaptered and the side break is acceptably placed. The disc includes Pamela Franklin's *a capella* overture of the film's unsettling *leitmotif* (often deleted from TV airings), and an original theatrical trailer (1.75:1, 2m 46s) that, viewed after this most delicate of chillers, is profoundly grating in its shrill overstatement.

THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME

1932, *The Roan Group* #RGL-9505, D/LB/+, \$39.98, 62m 19s

One of the best-known of the least-seen horror classics, producer Merian C. Cooper's **THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME** was based on a celebrated short story by American author Richard Connell—which received the 1924 O. Henry Memorial Award—and filmed simultaneously with **KING KONG** (1933), with which it shares several jungle sets. Directed by Ernest Schoedsack and Irving Pichel (**SHE**), the oft-imitated story finds renowned hunter Bob Rainsford (Joel McCrea) surviving a shipwreck and swimming to a private island owned by the crazed Russian sophisticate, Count Zaroff (Leslie Banks), himself a hunting enthusiast. Granted the Count's hospitality, Bob meets



Count Zaroff (Leslie Banks) glowers at a grisly trophy, visible only fleetingly in *THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME*.

other shipwrecked company in his castle—Eve Trowbridge (Fay Wray) and her besotted brother Martin (Robert Armstrong)—and learns that two of their fellows recently disappeared without explanation, after being shown Zaroff's trophy room. Behind its doors, Bob and Eve discover human heads mounted on the walls, and realize that Zaroff is deliberately luring ships into dangerous waters to provide his resort with huntable human prey—"the most dangerous game." When Bob refuses to join Zaroff in a hunt, he is reconsidered as prey and promised that he and Eve will be set free if they can survive the night. The excellent cast also includes Noble Johnson as Zaroff's brutish manservant, Ivan.

When **THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME** was first previewed, prints were timed at 78m; when the film was subsequently released by Radio Pictures, it had been reduced to approximately 63m—with some of the grislier sights from Zaroff's trophy room excised. As time wore on, the film became hard to see (so much so that its most oft-quoted line of dialogue—"First the hunt, then the revels"—is revealed here to be quite incorrect [The actual line: "It is after the chase—and then only—that man revels!"]); when it eventually surfaced on various public domain video labels in the early 1980s, it had also become hard to watch and hear. A typical release was that of Memory Lane Video, whose 1984 cheapo cassette was cloudy-looking,

hissy-sounding, full of soundtrack pops, and splicy; it also ran 61m 57s—22s shorter than the newly restored version now available on laserdisc from The Roan Group.

With this disc, producers Cary and Toby Roan have delivered what is likely to remain the definitive **MOST DANGEROUS GAME**, a major restoration that outclasses their fine recobbling of **WHITE ZOMBIE** earlier this year. There are one or two artificially sustained fades, a few double-printed frames, heavy speckling at some reel changes, and some individual shots (particularly effects shots) with exaggerated grain, but most of the footage displayed here is exceptionally crisp and clean, awakening an awesome appreciation of texture and detail in the film's art direction

and its performances. Banks' performance in particular is given heightened clarity; whereas earlier, fuzzier copies of the film implied that Banks was merely glowering and overacting in the style of his day, the newly lucid focus heightens our awareness that one side of the actor's face was in fact paralyzed, and this trait was well-exploited by cinematographer Henry Gerrard's inventive lighting schemes.

While the film's restored beauty is by no means inconsiderable, we were particularly excited by two seemingly minor details that seem to have eluded the notice of this disc's annotators. First, as mentioned earlier, the Roan disc assembles a small amount of additional footage, which is revelatory in at least one instance. After Bob is caught in the trophy room, and Zaroff has tried to persuade him to join the hunt as a hunter, the Count steps aside to reveal—in the background of the shot—a 1s shot of one of the film's censored trophies: a hollow-eyed, human corpse exhibited on a slab with a large dog mounted on its chest (Side 1, 36:24). This image is discussed by George Turner—co-author of *THE MAKING OF KING KONG* and former editor of *AMERICAN CINEMATOGRAPHER*—on the analog audio commentary track, but he does not draw our attention to its presence in this shot. Secondly, in the accompanying booklet containing a brief production article by Turner and a reproduction of the original press-book, the Roans have neglected to caption an astonishing piece of promotional advertising, which shows Zaroff, silver-haired and mustached, smoking a cigarette while framed by an assortment of the film's censored mounted heads. The heads are fascinating

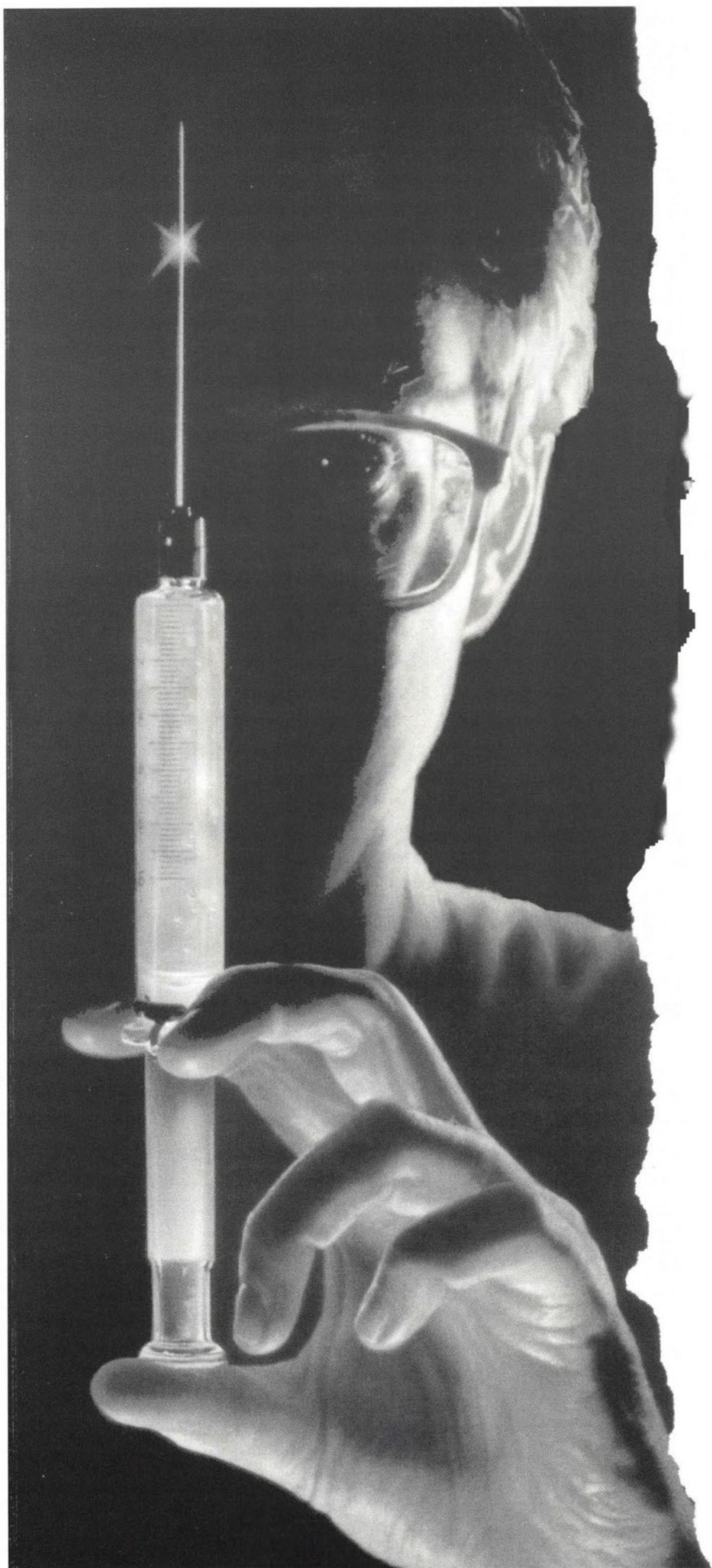
to see, but even more fascinating is Zaroff himself, who—despite the attached ad copy, which mentions **LESLIE BANKS** in capital letters—is embodied in the photo by **KING KONG** co-star *Bruce Cabot*! Turner's commentary mentions that Cabot auditioned for the role, but proved unequal to Banks' abilities. Why he posed for such a promotional photo is anyone's guess, but it suggests that he got along further in the casting process than Turner supposes.

The audio commentary by Turner is informative, but also quite eccentric. This is The Roan Group's first attempt at providing such a bonus, and it shows they have some things to learn about preparing such a feature. Unlike the meticulously timed commentaries found on Criterion Collection discs, for example, this one sounds like Turner was simply asked to free-associate while watching the movie. He's somewhat turtle-paced, but he knows what he's talking about—as when, for instance, he identifies an early shark attack as being stock footage from the '20s silent **BIRD OF PARADISE**, or when he discusses how Max Steiner's orchestral accompaniment was considered fantastic in itself in the early sound era, a time when music (if used at all) had to be shown emanating from a radio or some other explainable source. Turner is occasionally embarrassed by a lack of sound editing ("The miniature for this shot was done by... uh well, sorry 'bout that"), and the listener is disappointed by the track's lack of closure, when our commentator simply disappears from the track without a farewell.

The film is given an abrupt and unfortunate side-break, which interrupts an exciting

chase, and resumes on Side 2 in CAV. (If you think Side 1 looked good...) The main feature is followed by a "Still and Poster Gallery," encompassing not only **THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME** but two of its remakes, Robert Wise's **A GAME OF DEATH** (1946) and Roy Boulting's **RUN FOR THE SUN** (1956). Despite Side 2's CAV formatting, this chapter is programmed to be viewed in Play mode. Accompanying the impressive publicity photos for **THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME**—many of them posed specifically for the camera—is a new recording of two haunting Max Steiner pieces composed for the film, which have never been heard intact until now. The combination of music and images is undeniably charming, and conveys the strong sense of the disc producers' love for this project. Also provided are a sepia-tone print of Willis O'Brien's silent **KONG**-related short **CREATION** (with musical accompaniment that can be tuned out by accessing the second analog channel), and trailers for **KING KONG** and **MIGHTY JOE YOUNG** (1949)—the latter affording the only current means of examining that film's stop-motion animation frame-by-frame.

Of course, any amount of restoration and respectful handling would be moot if the film was undeserving. But **THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME** is one of the most beautiful, intelligent and hair-raising horror films of its period—a film whose shock waves have continued to resonate in such recent popular fare as John Woo's **HARD TARGET** (1993). If you're under the age of 65 and haven't seen this disc, you've never felt the full impact of this movie, one of the finest and most influential thrillers of all time.



RE-ANIMATOR

1985, Elite Entertainment
#EE4323, D/LB/+, \$49.98,
85m 42s

It's hard to believe that a decade has passed since we first saw **RE-ANIMATOR**, Stuart Gordon's outrageous directorial debut, but here's a deluxe "10th Anniversary Letterboxed Edition" to prove it. Loosely based on episodes from H.P. Lovecraft's serialized pulp novella *HERBERT WEST—RE-ANIMATOR*, the film came out of nowhere to become an overnight success, its combination of unrated gore, uninhibited nudity and gallows humor endearing it instantly to moviegoers disappointed by George Romero's long-awaited (and comparatively humorless) **DAY OF THE DEAD**, released the same year. In the decade since **RE-ANIMATOR**'s theatrical release, only Michele Soavi's *Della Morte Dell'Amore* (still unreleased in America) can boast of having gone so far and remained so entertaining. To be sure, the film is flawed, but its rough edges are eminently forgivable in light of the talent, inventiveness and creative bravery shown by its cast and crew.

Brilliant student Herbert West (Jeffrey Combs) relocates to Miskatonic Medical School from a Swiss medical academy after the mysterious and violent death of his mentor. He promptly challenges the teachings of Miskatonic's chief surgeon, Dr. Carl Hill (David Gale)—whose papers have plagiarized his mentor's discoveries—and becomes the roommate of fellow student Dan Cain (Bruce Abbott), the boyfriend of Meg Halsey (Barbara Crampton), the daughter of Miskatonic's Dean Halsey (Robert Sampson). After Dan discovers a dead cat attacking him in the cellar one night, West tells him about his discovery of a luminous fluid capable of

reanimating dead bodies when injected into the heart or brain. Converted to his roommate's cause, yet frightened by its implications, Dan assists West by sneaking him into the morgue with the goal of reanimating a human subject. Things get out of hand when Dean Halsey intrudes on their illegal experiments, gets himself killed by an overenthused zombie, and must be reanimated to help cover our hapless heroes' tracks.

Previously, **RE-ANIMATOR** has been released twice on disc, by Vestron and Image Entertainment respectively. Although both discs were labelled as "unrated," this was true only of the Vestron edition. The Image disc contained the R-rated version originally released on tape by Vestron, an alternate assembly made without the participation (or awareness) of the film's director or producer. Although shorn of most of the unrated version's legendary gore and nudity, the R version was actually *8m 48s longer* than its "uncut" counterpart, containing a surprising amount of important and clarifying material. Among the added highlights was a reinstated subplot about Dr. Hill's hypnotic command over the will of others—most particularly Dean Halsey, who becomes his unwitting pawn—and a scene in which Dan discovers West strung-out, trying to shoot-up a diluted form of the reagent—which he uses as a (highly addictive) form of speed. The scene explains a great deal about Jeffrey Combs' intense, jittery performance, which seems overdone without it. Literally all of the scenes exclusive to the R-rated version brought a greater depth to the film's characters, relationships or exposition; the unrated version may have been more extreme, but the characters

were more cartoonish and their relationships had to be taken on faith. One would imagine that an ideal version of the film would combine all of this material, but it would also inevitably slow it way down.

This deluxe set contains a new transfer of the unrated version, separate audio commentaries for Gordon (Analog 1) and producer Brian Yuzna and cast members Jeffrey Combs, Barbara Crampton, Bruce Abbott and Robert Sampson (Analog 2), and a supplement consisting of various trailers and TV spots, sixteen deleted scenes (previously included in the R-rated version), and an additional dream sequence never before seen by the public. The extra scenes amount to 26m 8s of additional material.

Elite's new transfer delivers a super-looking, rich-sounding, 1.85:1 soft-matted frame that offers conspicuously less image than previous full-screen releases. (Vestron's previous unrated tape and disc unmasked the entire upper matte area, whereas Elite's matted transfer gains only a sliver of information on the left. That said, Mac Ahlberg's compositions look attractively balanced throughout.) The film is ideally chaptered and the side break is perfectly chosen.

The additional scenes from the R-rated version are presented unmatted, though the nightmare sequence is presented unscored, unlooped, and with matting intact. The highlight of this newly discovered sequence (which the film was wise to lose) is a nude appearance by Barbara Crampton, who was reportedly unhappy to learn of its recovery, though she sounds like a good sport on the commentary track, while viewing the playback of a far more notorious nude scene.

The audio commentaries are excellent, equally split between the seriously informative (Gordon's) and the giddily entertaining (Yuzna's). Gordon does an amazing job, evidently recording his reminiscences without a script, but timing them beautifully. He notes that the film was shot at S&A Studios, where the previous production had been **THE TERMINATOR**, with which **RE-ANIMATOR** shared much of its crew; it's also interesting to learn that the first reanimated corpse—the muscular one—was played by Peter Kent, who works as Arnold Schwarzenegger's stunt double. Gordon ends with a poignant memory of David Gale (who died of a heart attack a few years ago) telling him that the film had "re-animated" his love of acting, much as it had given Gordon himself a new life—as a film director. As for the actors' commentary track, it gives us great insight into the performers' real lives and personalities, and the circumstances of filming, increasing our appreciation and respect for what they helped to create. Here, it's revealed that David Gale's wife was so shocked by the infamous scene in which Dr. Hill's severed head tongues its way toward Meg's crotch (which left Gale himself feeling "spiritually bereft") that she stormed out of the screening room and actually left him.

The disc is nicely packaged in a colorful, gatefold sleeve with liner notes about the film's troubled post-production history by Yuzna. Inside, there's a detailed Watchdoggian menu of where the deleted scenes were originally placed in the film's continuity, with precise time-coded instructions about how to cobble together a truly complete edition of **RE-ANIMATOR** for one's own private use.





By Douglas E. Winter

DRG

1995 *may well be remembered* as the Year of the Italian Soundtrack. In addition to the outstanding releases from diverse import sources noted in earlier columns, DRG Records has now initiated an ambitious "Classic Italian Soundtracks" series for direct marketing in the United States through Koch International. Focusing less on individual scores than on thematic and composer collections, the series to date has proved nothing less than exceptional.

The jewel of the series is GOBLIN: THEIR HITS, RARE TRACKS & OUTTAKES COLLECTION (DRG 32904, \$15.99, 27 tracks, 75m 55s), which celebrates the 20th anniversary of this highly influential progressive rock group [VW 25:56-59, 26:72-74] with *seventeen* previously unreleased tracks (including four cues for the television program LA VIA DELLA DROGA) as well as three first appearances on CD [cues from the television program CHI? and the main title of Joe D'Amato's BUIO OMEGA ("Buried Alive")]. Goblin's more familiar scores are supplemented with the likes of an alternate take of "Death Dies" from PROFONDO ROSSO and the music video version of Claudio Simonetti's main title for PHENOMENA. The liner notes by Didier Deutsch are enthusiastic but not always reliable (describing PROFONDO ROSSO as Argento's "first effort" and BUIO OMEGA as a "futuristic" film).

AN ENNIO MORRICONE—DARIO ARGENTO TRILOGY (DRG 32911, \$15.99, 16 tracks, 77m 52s), features abridged scores from L'UCCELLO DALLE

PIUME DI CRISTALLO ("The Bird with the Crystal Plumage"), IL GATTO A NOVE CODE ("Cat O'Nine Tails") and 4 MOSCHE DI VELLUTO GRIGIO ("Four Flies on Grey Velvet"). The complete music is available on discs from Cinevox and Point Music [VW 25:56-57], but TRILOGY includes, as its closing track, a brief interview, in Italian, with *Maestro* Argento (an English translation is included with the liner notes).

THE HORROR FILMS COLLECTION (DRG 32903, \$15.99, 23 tracks, 75m 53s). gathers rare tracks from the Cinevox FANTAFESTIVAL CDs, including a suite of Gino Marinuzzi's music for Mario Bava's TERRORE NELLO SPAZIO ("Planet of the Vampires") and the Bixio-Frizzi-Tempera main title for Lucio Fulci's 7 NOTE IN NERO ("The Psychic"), whose melody is played on—what else?—the seven black keys of a piano; but the centerpiece is a special 20th anniversary release, for the first time in any form, of the haunting orchestral music composed by Giorgio Gaslini for PROFONDO ROSSO, which was supplanted, save for its lullaby, by the now-legendary rock performance of Goblin.

The diversity of the DRG series is underscored by its willingness to explore the rich variety of Italian genre music. Its discs champion not only the horror film, but comedies, romances, art films, and inevitably—and at welcome length—the Western. SPAGHETTI WESTERNS VOLUME ONE (DRG 32905, \$31.99, 2 CDs, 67 tracks, 152m 7s) and VOLUME TWO (DRG 32909, \$31.99, 2 CDs, 63 tracks, 150m 49s) compile the major themes from sixty Italian Westerns, from the well known—DJANGO and IL MIO NOME E' NESSUNO ("My Name Is Nobody")—to the decidedly obscure, such as PARTIRONO PRETI E TORNARONO CURATI ("Halleluja to Vera Cruz"). Although the 4-CD SPAGHETTI WESTERN ENCYCLOPEDIA [VW 29:76] has a superior selection of music, DRG's SPAGHETTI WESTERNS is a perfect complement, with virtually no overlapping tracks and a bounty of previously unreleased cues.

DRG will resume its ambitious series early in 1996. Interested readers may join its private mailing list (and encourage its efforts) by writing to DRG Records Inc., 130 West 57th Street, New York NY 10019.

But That's Not All...


Other labels have been equally active in bringing the rich heritage of Italian film music to compact disc. Recent noteworthy releases include the lush orchestral scores of Riz Ortolani for the controversial Jacopetti "mondo documentary" ADDIO ZIO TOM ("Addio Uncle Tom") (RCA BVCP 1042,

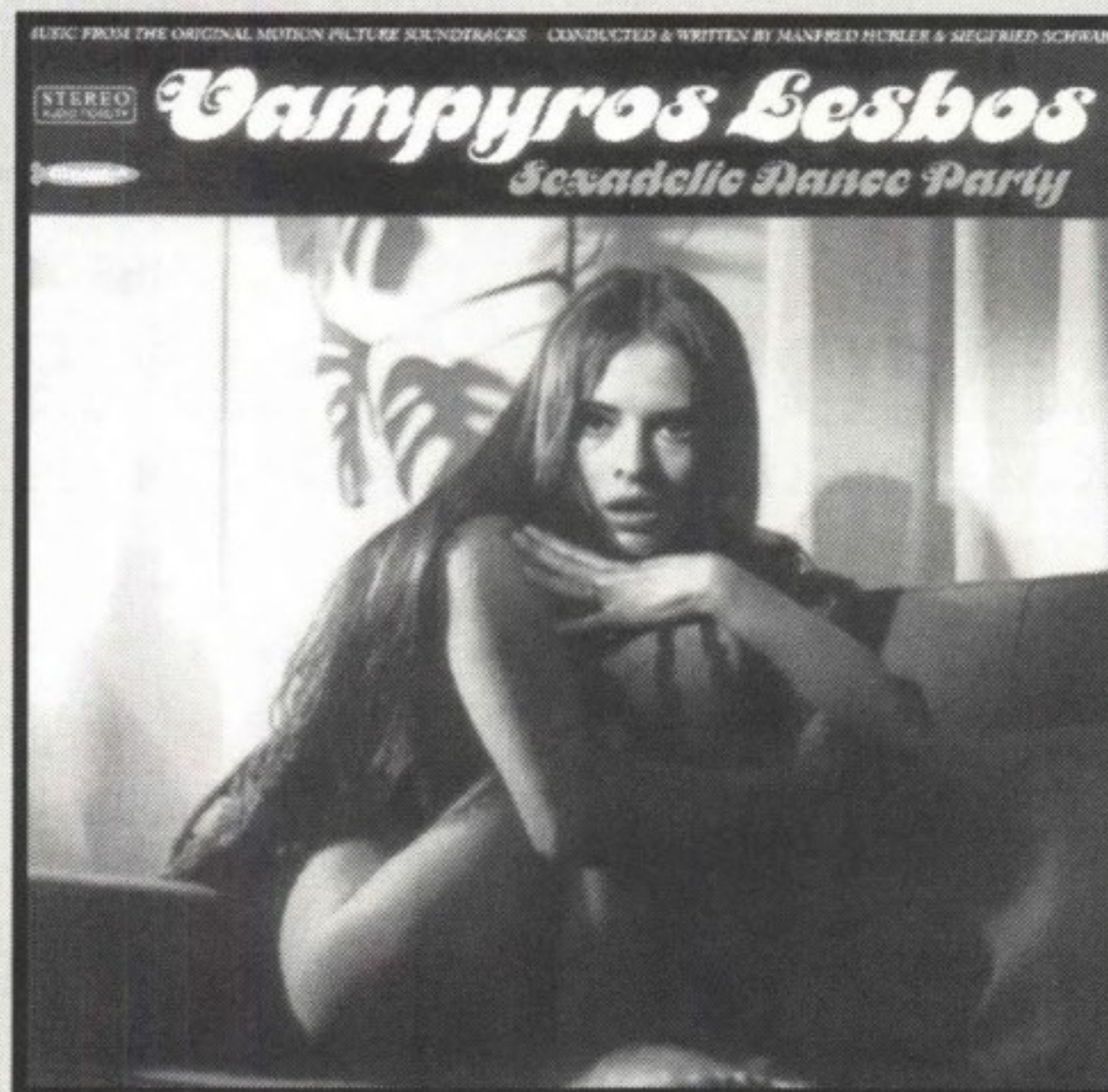
Japan, ¥2,000, 13 tracks, 34m 57s) and the early Lucio Fulci *giallo* NON SI SEVIZIA UN PAPERINO ("Don't Torture a Duckling"), which is supplemented with Ortolani's score for LE AMAZZONI ("The Amazons") (Point PRCD 113, Italy, approx. \$18.99, 21 tracks, 58m 32s). One of Luis Bacalov's fine Italian Western scores, for the Lee Van Cleef vehicle IL GRANDE DUELLO ("Big Showdown" / "The Grand Duel"), has been paired with his light-hearted SI PUO' FARE... AMIGO ("It Can Be Done... Amigo") (Point PRCD 120, Italy, approx. \$18.99, 24 tracks, 57m 23s). But perhaps the most surprising release of late 1995 came from the enigmatic Italian label Mask, whose only prior disc was a pairing of the highly sought-after Ennio Morricone soundtracks for LA RESA DEI CONTI ("The Big Gundown") and FACCIA A FACCIA ("Face to Face") [VW 30:72].

Now Mask has issued another Holy Grail of the soundtrack world, John Barry's masterwork for Dino de Laurentiis, KING KONG (Mask 702, Italy, approx. \$18.99, 13 tracks, 42m 6s). Look for this one quickly, before it disappears.

Franco Frenzy

Peter Blumenstock's Lucertola Media continues to delight listeners and lovers of European horror films alike with 3 FILMS BY JESS FRANCO (Lucertola LMCD 004, Germany, DM 35, 24 tracks, 68m 3s). The compilation features music by Manfred Hübler and Siegfried Schwab from VAMPYROS LESBOS, DER TEUFEL KAM AUS AKASAVA ("The Devil Came from Akasava") and SIE TÖTETE IN EKSTASE ("Mrs. Hyde" / "She Kills in Ecstasy"), and it's fair to say that their compositions are like no other film music you're likely to hear in a long, long time. Recorded in the late sixties, the scores are beyond psychedelic, becoming hip and trippy psychotic episodes with bursts of sitar, fuzztoned guitar and Hammond organ that dance nervously into the macabre. Imagine, if you will, the Electric Prunes' "Mass in F Minor" gone Satanic; but even then realize that this is one of those discs you must experience to believe. With liner notes by our own Tim Lucas, and memorable illustrations of the sublime Soledad Miranda, 3 FILMS BY JESS FRANCO is highly recommended. Issued in a limited edition of 500 copies, it is nearly out of print. Orders must be placed with VIDEO WATCHDOG, PO Box 5293, Cincinnati OH 45205-0283 (1-800-275-8395) for \$22 ppd. or \$25 ppd. (outside USA); Visa/MC accepted. Lucertola Media has exhausted their supply.

Contact the Audio Watchdog c/o One Eyed Dog,
PO Box 28365, Washington DC 20038. 



Attention FRANCO Fans!

Franco completists should be aware that Lucertola Media's 3 FILMS BY JESS FRANCO has been sub-licensed by Crippled Dick Hot Wax, a German "Easy Listening" label, which has collected the outstanding tracks on a repackaged, resequenced disc called VAMPYROS LESBOS SEXADELIC DANCE PARTY (#022, 48:51). Though this reissue deletes 10 tracks from the original, it delivers a more consistent pop music experience as a result. The new packaging is drop-dead gorgeous, with lovely Soledad Miranda pictured in color on the front, back and on the disc as well! The booklet has been expanded to include more color, and additional liner notes by Peter Blumenstock.

Equally (if not more) desirable is Crippled Dick's limited edition 12" vinyl release—available on black, red and white vinyl—which also features two shots of Soledad on the record label! We've heard that VAMPYROS LESBOS SEXADELIC DANCE PARTY has been acquired for domestic release, but we have no details at this time. For pricing and other information, contact Crippled Dick Hot Wax, PO Box 3864, 78027 VS-Schwenningen Germany, or phone/fax at 011-49-7720-22435. —TL

BIBLIO WATCHDOG

IMMORAL TALES SEX & HORROR CINEMA IN EUROPE 1956-1984

By Cathal Tohill and Pete Tombs

St. Martin's Press (USA), 272 pages, \$17.95

Primitive Press (UK), £15.95, 272 pages

THE SLEAZE MERCHANTS ADVENTURES IN EXPLOITATION FILMMAKING

By John McCarty

St. Martin's Press, \$16.95 (US)

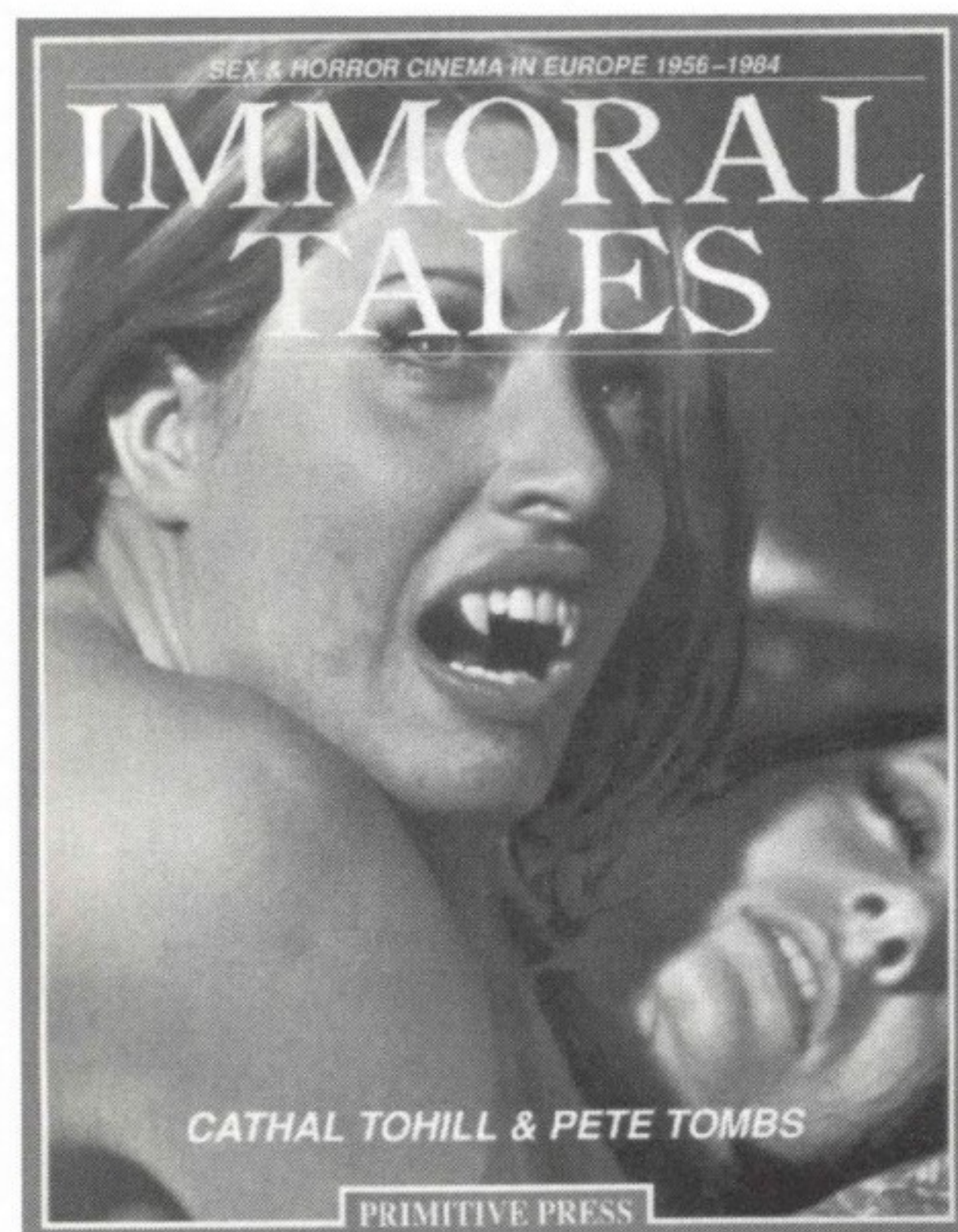
\$23.50 (Canada), 292 pages

Reviewed by Tim Lucas

IT'S A SOURCE of endless bemusement to me that two of the latest film books to originate from St. Martin's Press devote entire chapters to the work of Jess Franco. One of them, moreover, addresses itself almost entirely to horror films that have never received an official theatrical or video release in the United States. The blotchy, corroded, GenX cover designs of these books are similar in their ugliness, but any resemblance between them ends there; it should be obvious from the titles alone that one of these books hails from Britain, where they still take movies seriously, and the other... doesn't.

The latter is the latest offering from the inexhaustible John McCarty, best-known as the author of *SPLATTER MOVIES*, *PSYCHOS*, and a number of other books recycled and repackaged therefrom. While McCarty receives sole credit on the cover of *THE SLEAZE MERCHANTS*, he actually wrote only 4½ of its 15 chapters (some of which first appeared in his earlier *THE AMAZING HERSCHELL GORDON LEWIS*) while the bulk of the material was contributed by Ken Hanke (author of McFarland's excellent *CHARLIE CHAN AT THE MOVIES*), filmmaker Bruce G. Hallenbeck, and fanzine publisher Walter L. Gay.

THE SLEAZE MERCHANTS devotes individual chapters to Sam Katzman, Edward D. Wood Jr.,



Herschell Gordon Lewis, David F. Friedman, Andy Milligan, Ted V. Mikelis, Al Adamson, Jess Franco, John Waters, William Lustig, Fred Olen Ray, Jim Wynorski, David DeCoteau, Bret McCormick and Brett Piper. The text is inconsistent, with some chapters coasting by on chatty interviews, while others tackle career overviews with all the penetration of a 25-words-or-less essay. Most of these careers have already been covered definitively in books you already own (or should), such as ReSearch's *INCREDIBLY STRANGE FILMS*, Rudolph Grey's *NIGHTMARE OF ECSTASY* and Tom Weaver's *POVERTY ROW HORRORS!* while the young filmmakers covered in the latter chapters are interrogated more skillfully and candidly in Maitland McDonagh's new Citadel book *FILMMAKING ON THE FRINGE*. That leaves Jess Franco and Andy Milligan, both of whom are documented by Walter L. Gay.

The Franco chapter is a particular mess, riddled with errors, ignoring his most accomplished work in favor of his most accessible junk, and offering a number of uninformed critical asides. (Our favorite concerns **COUNT DRACULA**, which the author praises for sticking closely to Stoker's novel, for Christopher Lee's authentic portrayal, for Klaus Kinski's performance as "the screen's best Renfield," for Maria Rohm's beauty

and Bruno Nicolai's "outstanding" score... and then condemns across the board for not being filmed in Victorian London! Gay then parenthetically ponders why producer Harry "Allan" [sic] Towers didn't shoot the film in his native country, obviously knowing nothing about the cost of filming in Great Britain, tax shelter deals, co-production deals, or any other realities governing the world of low-budget filmmaking.) While Gay accuses Franco of continually "flout[ing] the laws of good moviemaking" (oh? and what are *they?*), he goes out of his way to honor the futile fumbblings of Andy Milligan, always giving him the benefit of the doubt ("the title of [**MONSTROSITY**] can't be accused of misrepresentation") and sugar-coating his groans until they sound as enthusiastic as they are ungrammatical (eg., "This one is wholeheartily recommended for insomniacs only").

THE SLEAZE MERCHANTS is also a salt for sore eyes; it contains some of the worst art direction and photo reproduction of any book ever to carry the imprint of a major New York publisher. Most of its illustrations appear to have been photographed from smudgy newsprint sources, and then further insulted with arty splatter patterns; some pages look like the proofs were used to hold dripping paint cans while St. Martin's had their offices re-decorated.

In contrast to this careless, cynical attempt to cash-in on the growing interest in outrageous movies, Tohill and Tombs' **IMMORAL TALES** is a serious, in-depth study that ranks with the best available books on the horror cinema. It is intelligently written, amusing rather than self-amused, and designed with impeccable taste. The stills alone open a whole new world to readers which has never been so richly availed in book form. It also focuses on a most rewarding and underappreciated area of production: the European sex-horror boom that began in 1956 with *I Vampiri* ("The Vampires"), co-directed by Riccardo Freda and Mario Bava, which inspired three other surgically-themed releases of 1959-60: France's *Les Yeux sans Visage* (US: **THE HORROR CHAMBER OF DR. FAUSTUS**), Germany's *Die Nackte und der Satan* (US: **THE HEAD**) and the first modern horror film to include nudity, Italy's *Il Mulino della donna pietra* (US: **MILL OF THE STONE WOMEN**).

The book opens with chapters devoted to the historical precedents of exploitation film production in Italy, Germany, France and Spain, with each survey followed by reviews of key works originating from these countries. The bulk of **IMMORAL TALES**, however, is devoted to longer chapters

exploring the *oeuvres* of six key directors: Jess Franco, Jean Rollin, José Larraz, José Bézérar, Walerian Borowczyk and Alain Robbe-Grillet.

Each chapter is thoroughly enriched with critical opinion, hard data (like production costs), background anecdotes and insights from the filmmakers themselves. Thus, in the Franco chapter, **TENDER AND PERVERSE EMANUELLE** and *Macumba Sexual*—the kind of movies that would provoke condescending chuckles in McCarty's book—are respectively explored as "a pivotal work" and "one of the last glorious death throes" of the Euro-exploitation cinema. Sadly, this otherwise enlightening chapter suffers from poor editing. Obviously written out of sequence, it mentions how quickly Franco works more than once, and compares his directorial approach to improvisational jazz a few times too often.

The chapters devoted to Larraz (**VAMPYRES**), Borowczyk (**IMMORAL TALES**), and Bézérar (**SEXUS**) are more informative than any magazine article ever devoted to their work, and the chapter about the films of Robbe-Grillet (**TRANS-EUROPE EXPRESS**) deserves particular praise for discussing his hard-to-see (and usually over-analyzed) work in a popular context. Yet **IMMORAL TALES** reaches its apex in its Jean Rollin chapter. Though it makes the minor mistake of classifying *Bacchanales Sexuelles* as a hardcore film, you will never find Rollin's work presented with more respect, insight and tenderness than it is rendered here. This chapter alone is worth the price of this volume—which can also be said of the 16-page color section, which reproduces some ravishing, seldom-seen, European stills and poster art. The book concludes with a useful and opinionated appendix of key players in the history of European sex-horror cinema, and a short chapter documenting the influence of *fumetti* (Italian photo comics) on these films.

The British edition cover—a color shot of Britt Nichols preparing to bite Anne Libert's neck in Franco's *DAUGHTER OF DRACULA* [*Les Filles du Dracula*, 1971], framed in red—has been changed for the US market to another of St. Martin's blotchy cover collages, but don't let that dissuade you from buying what is bound to be a key addition to your reference library.

My hearty endorsement of this book is given despite the fact that it haunts me with an old CINEFANTASTIQUE review of **VAMPYRES** by "Cincinnati critic Tim Lucas." I no longer share the opinion expressed herein by my former self, and "Cincinnati critic" sounds like a veiled potshot, but it's worth the indignity to find myself bunked on an index page beside Bela Lugosi.



THE LETTERBOX



ORGANIZE AND PRIORITIZE

Being a reader of yours since the days of VIDEO TIMES, I'm surprised by the changes your publication has taken recently in the quality and variety of subjects covered. While I'm delighted to see attention given to many of our master directors, such as Kurosawa, Truffaut and Buñuel—and would love to see a piece on Peckinpah's restored **THE WILD BUNCH** and the less-than-favorably-restored **PAT GARRETT AND BILLY THE KID**—I've been feeling that your priorities seem to be getting a little confused.

I can understand that, as a fantasy-based publication, you must cover a good deal of hit studio slop like the STAR WARS films and James Cameron's movies, but I can't help questioning the lack of reviews of such recent, Watchdog-worthy releases as the widescreen edition of **THE HAUNTING**, **HEAVENLY CREATURES**, **REPULSION**, **THE HOWLING**, **BARON BLOOD/LISA AND THE DEVIL**, **ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST**, or the VSoM Jean Rollin titles, just to name a few, while reading about such lesser material as **TRUE LIES?** **CABIN BOY??** **THE RETURN OF JAFAR???** **EARTHQUAKE????**

If the omitted titles have been put aside for perhaps a more complete or detailed story, that's great, but you should still run a brief transfer quality review first, as a hint of what the buyer can expect. Is **ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST** full-scale Panavision? (Not!) Just how speckly is it? (Quite a bit.) Now that Rollin's prints are licensed through VSoM, are we going to see cleaner, more vibrant prints? (Not in this lifetime!) We need timely reviews of these titles, so we don't throw away our money on trashy transfers.

It's because of the overall greatness of VW that I felt the

need to bring this up. I admire your individuality and, even if I'm less than thrilled with Asian films, Godzilla, anime and Ed Wood movies, I can see the necessity of including all these things in VW.

Richard Kandalic
Merrillville, IN

Your points are well-taken, Richard, and reflect some concerns I've had for awhile now. No one knows better than me that VW needs to cover more material in each issue, but can we shorten our reviews without forfeiting their identity? I don't think so, but our laserdisc section might well benefit from the addition of shorter, info-driven reviews. We'll give it a try in our next issue. Of course, which discs get covered in-depth will depend entirely on which films and transfers I feel like writing about at length...

*I must impress upon you, though, that no reader of this magazine can know the "priorities" that go into producing it. For one thing, MGM and Paramount do not supply us with review tapes or discs; we must give priority to materials sent for review, which is why you won't be seeing in-depth coverage of MGM's **THE HAUNTING** or Paramount's **ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST** in our pages anytime soon. Furthermore, what gets covered depends on available space, and when it gets covered often depends on what I feel most like watching as our deadline approaches. I expected to cover Elite's excellent **BARON BLOOD/LISA AND THE DEVIL** long before now, as well as **MANIAC**, but I happened to review **RE-ANIMATOR** first... and that's all the space we can offer Elite in this issue, in all fairness to our other suppliers. We'll be covering Bava, Lustig and*

other titles mentioned in your letter next issue—I promise.

In the meantime, I hope our extensive Rollin coverage in this issue proves worth your wait. And if you find our other reviews boring, I suggest (to paraphrase Robert Fripp) that you try reading them until they no longer bore you.

SHE WHO MUST BE RESTORED

Regarding the Kino release of **SHE** (1935), yes, it's great to finally see this film in a good quality, legitimate video release. However, there are close to 8m missing from the Kino version. About a year and a half ago, I bought a copy of **SHE** from a mail-order company whose name I have forgotten (it was not Foothill Video, whose copy is basically identical to Kino's in content). This copy was reconstructed from several prints, including a few shots with subtitles in some Slavic-looking language! The overall quality was not very good, but there was enough additional content to bring the running time up to approximately 102m!

The additional footage appears to last an entire reel, which starts directly after the first throne room scene (approximately 43:04 into the Kino tape). In it, Tanya explores the darkened corridors of the city of Kor, and sneaks past a handful of guards into She's inner sanctum, where She is looking after the injured Leo. She's jealousy is aroused when Tanya holds the hand of the unconscious Leo, and She coldly explains: "Once, long ago, a woman like you destroyed my happiness. The same thing shall not happen again." A scene between Holly and the main guard (Gustav von Seyffertitz) ensues, in which Holly pumps him for information about the Flame of Life. The guard is

wary and says little. Tanya is escorted back by servants, and she tells Holly that She believes Leo to be John Vincey, who once belonged to her. The scene ends with Holly wondering aloud if it could be true.

All in all, there isn't any information in this missing footage that isn't dealt with elsewhere, so no plot is lost. However, the additional set-up of Tanya's budding love for Leo, and She's growing jealousy, helps to smooth things out a little. Also, there is some wonderful photography as Tanya makes her way through the darkened, dramatically lit sets.

Jim Doherty
Chicago, IL

***SHE** was originally released by Radio Pictures in a 101m version, then reduced to 95m for its later reissue, to better tailor it for double billing. Evidently, the discarded footage was preserved—as it often is—in foreign archives. If anyone out there knows the name of the company Jim can't remember, let us know! By the way, since our review of **SHE** appeared in VW #30, it has been released on laserdisc by Image Entertainment (#ID3148KN, \$39.99)—bar none, the best-looking version available anywhere.*

HANDLE WITH KIER

A few titles were missing from your Udo Kier filmography [VW SPECIAL EDITION 2:58-60], including **Am naechsten Morgen kehrte der Minister nicht an seinen Arbietzplatz zurueck** ("On the Next Morning...", 1986) and at least two more Schlimgensief films, **Tod eines Weltstars** (the bio film Udo mentions in the interview) and **Last Trip to Harrisburg**. Udo was also in one episode of the German TV series **KIR ROYAL** (1986, directed by Helmut Dietl).

Also, it was not Barbara Steele but Barbara Valentin (a famous Fassbinder actress) who was replaced by Kitten Natividad in **THE CRACK** [*Die Spalte*]. Ms. Valentin was actually in Zimbabwe on the first few days of the shoot, but stormed off the set ("I'm a serious actress!") and Christoph was very happy when Kitten agreed to take over. While filming the movie, the whole crew was arrested for a day or two (they were accused of making a pornographic movie) and the German embassy had to intervene.

Paul David Doherty
Germany

We understand that Barbara Steele was also offered the role, but turned it down after reading the script. The part would have cast her as the white mother of a black mutant infant, born with a penis growing out of its forehead.

KUDO FOR UDO

I just got VW SPECIAL EDITION #2. The Udo Kier interview was great. I was curious as to the time frame of the cover photo. I assume it's current, as opposed to circa Warhol. Was it posed especially for you?

Kevin Webster
Memphis, TN

Udo is always current! The photo originated from a recent session with photographer Greg Gorman, whom Udo hired to make some new publicity shots, which he planned to sell and autograph at horror convention appearances. Luckily for him, Udo's been too busy making movies to appear at conventions, so the picture has remained uncirculated! If anyone out there is interested in buying a print, you might try writing to The Del Valle Archive at P.O. Box 2983, Beverly Hills CA, 90210.

THE ITALIAN VERSIONS RUN SHORTS

I really enjoyed VW 28! About Paul Talbot's article: Is he sure that the two Paul Morrissey movies were shown intact here in Italy?

FLESH FOR FRANKENSTEIN is available here on video under its Italian title *Il mostro e' in tavola—Barone Frankenstein*, on the Azzurra Home Video label. It is missing about 6m of nudity, gore, etc. compared to the Dutch City Video release, which runs 91m. The same label's *Dracula vuole vivere... cerca sangue di vergine* is 5m shorter than my British **BLOOD FOR DRACULA** tape, which runs 99m.

You may also be interested to know that some scenes in both films were shot in covered and uncovered versions. Both Italian tapes show Joe Dallesandro wearing underpants during a couple of "bedroom activity" scenes, while they are missing in the same scenes in the American, British, Dutch and Japanese versions!

Maurizio Bertino
Biella, Italy

JUST PAUSE FOR SKULL SERVICE

Since the release of Elite Entertainment's disc of **HORROR HOTEL**, I have watched the film several times, but it wasn't until I showed it to my friend Chris that we discovered something strange. In Chapter 5, at 10m 44s, Chris noticed an odd blemish on Christopher Lee's face; it lasted only a second, but it was noticeable at regular speed. He suggested taping that section of the film, so that we could examine the blemish frame-by-frame.

On closer examination, we discovered that, as the camera pulls up from Lee's hands to his head, a skull is superimposed over

his face for a few frames! It's very brief, but even at regular speed, you can see something cover Lee's eyes for a second. Is this the earliest instance of this kind of subliminal in a horror movie, or just an undiscovered one?

Rodney Barnett
Murfreesboro, TN

*There were earlier subliminals in horror movies, like the ones found in 1958's **TERROR IN THE HAUNTED HOUSE**, but you seem to be the first to catch this one!*

ALL THAT WORK FOR NOTHING?

I was quite surprised to hear that Midnight Video had gone to so much trouble in order to reconstruct a supposedly complete version of Joe D'Amato's awful **ANTHROPOPHAGOUS** [VW 26]. If they had done a bit more than their three years (!) research, they might have discovered that it was once released totally uncut here in the UK as **ANTHROPOPHAGOUS THE BEAST** (Video Film Promotions), where it joined its sequel **ABSURD** on the so-called "Video Nasties" list back in 1984.

Its running time of 88m 12s (91m 57s NTSC) certainly makes Midnight's 87m 52m version look suspiciously incomplete, and also includes the so-called "pre-credits" sequence, where a couple are killed on the beach, correctly positioned *after* the opening credits. This must surely be obvious, as the opening credits show the soon-to-be-murdered couple walking to the beach!

To further confuse the issue, a trailer for Alberto Negrin's **RED RINGS OF FEAR** precedes the film, the tape of which in turn features a truly incredible trailer for... **ANTHROPOPHAGOUS THE BEAST**! The trailer features all of the grossest of the film's gore scenes, but *even gorier*! It

appears the gorier outtakes were substituted for use in the trailer only. Maybe the producers were under the impression that the special effects were fine for a quick glimpse in the trailer, but not good enough to make the final cut?

Marc Morris
London, England

AW, SHUCKS

I am writing in response to the penultimate letter in a recent issue, "Pitching Woo?" I am also completely uninterested in Hong Kong films. But unlike D. Kraft, I have some *very* strange praise for you.

This may be heresy, but in any given issue of VW, I will only find a handful of film/video titles I have ever seen or plan to see. However, unlike other publications, I routinely read VW front-to-back. Though I am not often convinced to go check out a new title, I find myself so engrossed in the quality of the writing, the passion, the incredibly meticulous research and painstaking attention to detail, that the feeling at the end of reading each new issue is pure exhilaration.

Those issues which give the Watchdog treatment to something I love, as in **TWIN PEAKS FIRE WALK WITH ME**, make me feel like I am reading a year's worth of diligent research. Therefore, I respect any movie that can inspire you to include it in your all-too-brief magazine.

The only problem I ever have with your magazine is, I finish reading it in a couple of hours. I know that's a terrible thing to complain about when it takes weeks, months and years to research what I can read about in minutes. I only wish each issue was twice the size, and monthly. Tim, don't faint! Wake up! Just kidding!

David Weems
Austin, TX

Maybe you'd like to be Editor for awhile, David. Every issue feels twice the size AND monthly from where I sit!



ERRATA

28:40 Our **SEVEN DEATHS IN THE CAT'S EYE** photo caption mistakenly identified German actress Doris Kunstmann as fellow cast member Françoise Christophe.

28:41 We incorrectly stated that no Antonio Margheriti film had yet made the jump to laserdisc. Both **YOR—THE HUNTER FROM THE FUTURE** and **THE STRANGER AND THE GUNFIGHTER** have been released on disc by RCA Columbia, and **INDIO** was released by Image Entertainment. A word to the wise: all three can currently be found in cut-out bins for under \$15.00!

28:53 The mountain transcribed as "Cicero" in our Margheriti interview is actually Monte Circeo, where Ulysses' men were turned into pigs by the enchantress Circe.

29:60 A crucial word was deleted from the following sentence: "(As Donna observed, 'I guess we should be grateful that Carpenter didn't bring along a grip')."

29:62 The **ISLAND OF LOST SOULS** photo caption misidentified Captain Davies (Stanley Field) as Captain Donohue, another role in the film played by Paul Hurst.

SE2:58-60

Our Udo Kier filmography contained some German spelling mistakes—a few of which originated with Udo's own resumé! Corrected titles are as follows:

1974: **Der letzte Schrei**

1977: **Bolwieser**

1980: **Lili Marleen**

1983: **Die wilden Fuenfziger**

1989: **Das deutsche Kettensaegenmassaker**

1994: **Rotwang muss weg!**

1994: **Max Skladanowsky** (release title:
Die brueder Skladanowsky)

1994: **Die Spalte** (not **Der Crack**)

30:21 In our review of **SCREAMING YELLOW THEATER VOLS. 1-5** we said that checks should be made payable to "Chris Thomas." Instead, checks should be made payable to "Rick Thomas."

Thanks to Paul David Doherty, Livio Jacob, Werner Petermann, Douglas Pratt and Rick Thomas.

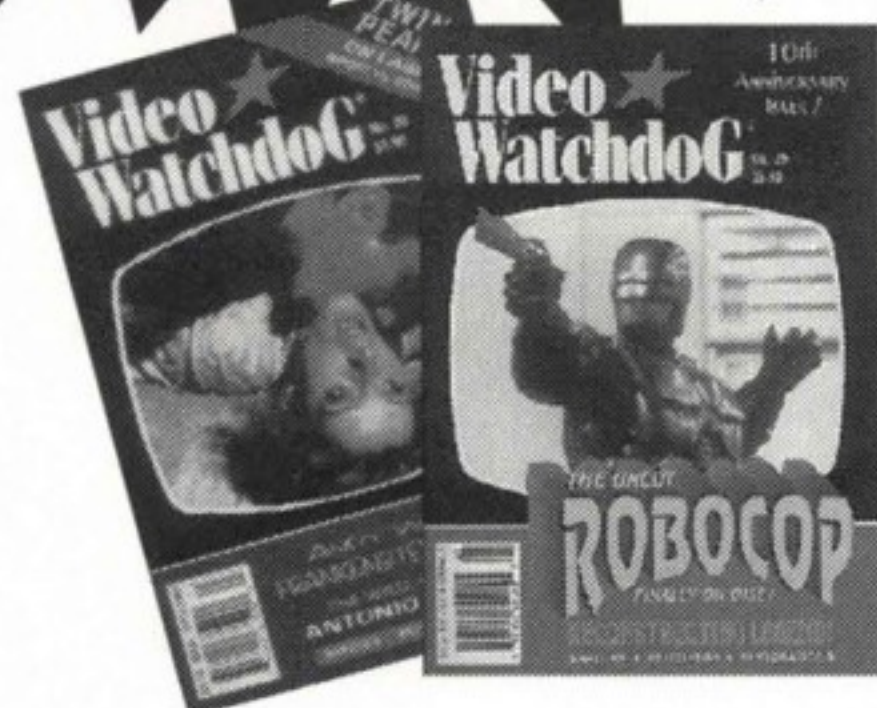
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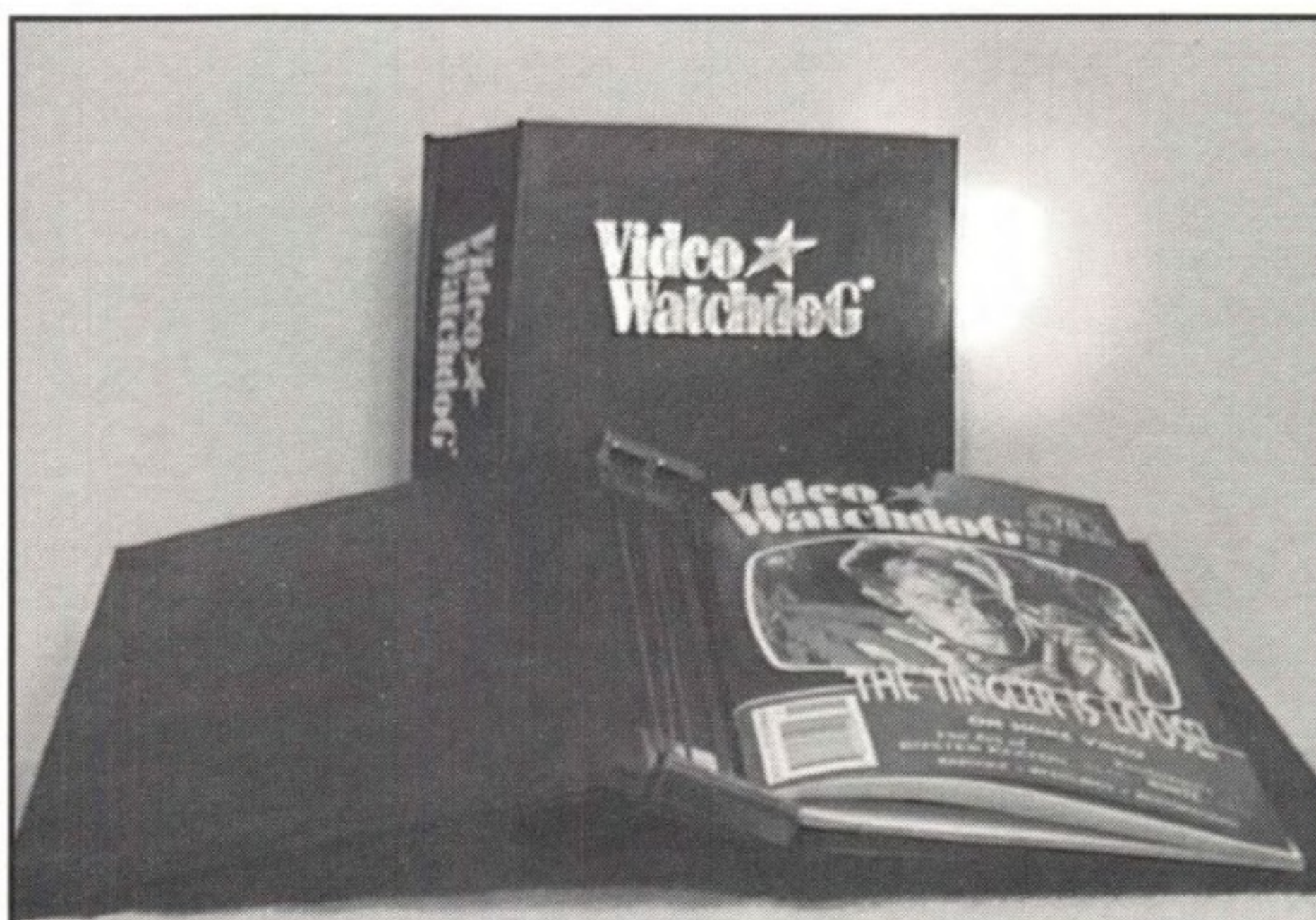
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